LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS KORACH

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS KORACH

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Korach* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

> "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Korach is about the rebel who saw into the future and wanted to bring the future ascendancy of the Levi into the present, prematurely.

Korach was not faulted for his anticipation of the future, rather it teaches us that the future is tightly connected to following the dictates of Moses in the present. As the slogan puts it: "our future depends on keeping our past vitally present."

ESSAY ONE

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Moshiach is the leader who brings out the best in us and enables us to realize our G-d given potential.

Only during this Messianic Age, ushered in by Moshiach, will the world experience true peace and unity.

ESSAY ONE

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

The Elusive Nature of Unity

Communism works in theory, but not in practice. At least, this is what many of Communism's critics and erstwhile supporters seem to agree upon. In truth, Communism does not even work in theory, because it is based on a faulty premise. Can people, from diverse backgrounds, with varied interests unite, only because it is in their best interest to unite? History has taught us that it is not possible. And yet, Judaism believes that in the Messianic Era we will experience this unity.

We can gain some insight into understanding why – as a result of human nature – it is currently impossible to truly unite and how in the future Messianic Age, that unity will become a reality, from this week's Torah portion, Korach.

Korach, Moses cousin, started a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. He refused to accept their exalted position in the Jewish community. His populist message was,

> "All of the community is holy, and G-d is within them. Why do you put yourselves above the Jewish community?"

Korach appeared to be hypocritical when he on the one hand, demanded equality for all, criticized Moses and Aaron's leadership positions, and yet he craved to be their leader.

Different Views of Leadership

The difference between his view of a leader and Moses' view was substantial. According to the Rebbe's teachings, Korach felt that all Jews are inherently good and holy. What need do they have for someone who towers above them and controls them?

On the other hand, Korach felt there should be a leader whose role would be more like the role of a coordinator, who is never aloof and distant from his people.

Korach's error was that the very fact that every Jew possesses a divine soul and is therefore inherently good and holy, is true only insofar as the inner dimension of every Jew is concerned. But, how does one access this inner holiness? How does one manifest this inner goodness? How does one act outwardly in a manner that is commensurate with their inner spirituality?

The answer is that the role of a Jewish leader, such as Moses and Aaron, because they were so exalted, was to transform their spark of G-dliness into a torch of G-dliness that would burn through all the layers of materiality and conventionality.

Souls on Fire Leadership

To allow the Jewish nation to remain the way they were, left to their own devices, with only an administrative "coordinator." was guaranteed to fail. The external pressures and the ease, with which the evil of the world can overshadow the internal good and holiness, would cause the majority of the people to falter.

Only Moses and Aaron, and similar leaders, whose souls were "on fire," were capable of bringing out the best in all of us, enabling us to access our inner soul and direct its vitality outward.

Any theory of unity that is based on leaving things the way they are because they are naturally good is doomed to fail. Any philosophy which is materialistic will surely cause its adherents to degenerate into discord and strife, because the physical and material aspects of our beings are the greatest causes for division.

Only a philosophy that recognizes the innate divinity of every person and that simultaneously believes in the role of a leader who ignites the spark so that the G-dly dimension of each individual is allowed to consume the material aspects of his existence - can lead to unity. Unity does not come naturally; it requires hard work, an inner spirituality and a great leader who inspires us to work for the unleashing of that spirituality.

Messianic Leadership

This sums up our belief in Moshiach and a Messianic Era. Moshiach is the leader who brings out the best in us and enables us to realize our G-d given potential. Only during this Messianic Age, ushered in by Moshiach, will the world experience true peace and unity.

ESSAY TWO

KORACH'S MISTAKE

Absolutely, we must treat each and every Jew as being equal in the eyes of G-d.

The correct conclusion to draw from this realization is that no Jew has a right to look down at another just because he or she has less knowledge, observance, or occupies a "lower" position in the hierarchy of the Jewish community.

But, by the same token, no individual can repudiate his or her special connection with the "heads" and "hearts" of the Jewish community; the Moses' and Aaron's, by denying their preeminent role.

ESSAY TWO

KORACH'S MISTAKE

Unusual Name!

Isn't it unusual for this week's Torah portion to be named Korach, arguably the worst Biblical Jew to have existed in the formative years of Jewish nationhood. Why would we name a section of the Torah after the rebel, rather than after the men who they were rebelling against, and who saved the Jewish people from destruction on numerous occasions–Moses and Aaron?

The answer provided in Chassidic thought is that, contrary to a superficial view of Korach, he was a principled and highly spiritual person. His error – as is true with so many well-intentioned people – was that he took his initial feelings and perceptions beyond the place where they could be justified, and failed to validate them when they were translated into action.

Almost every foolish or rebellious course of action begins with a valid premise. It is when the person builds on that

premise and draws unwarranted inferences from it, that causes even some of our best and well-intentioned to go downhill.

Indeed, this understanding of the dynamics of sin—the inability to draw correct inferences from a valid premise—can shed light on the fact that in all of the rebellions the Jews engaged in—including the Golden Calf, the Spies and the Rebellion of Korach—women either did not participate at all, or they even had a salutary effect on some of the men. Why were the women so different?

Women Excluded

One of the explanations of this phenomenon is that according to the Talmud women were endowed by G-d with a greater measure of the intellectual faculty called "Binah." One of the meanings of this term, which is usually translated as "understanding," is actually having the capacity to draw appropriate inferences from existing ideas.

While the men started with the right idea, they strayed from it when they took the idea to its next step. They veered off course, as it were. The internal talent that women possess to stay focused even when going to a second and third level is what kept them from straying.

What was Korach's premise and how did he stray?

Korach declared: "All of the community is holy and G-d is within them." Korach saw each Jew as possessing the same spiritual soul as every other Jew. This is the premise that we know is true. Indeed, the commandment to "love your fellow as yourself" is predicated on that very notion, that our souls have a common G-dly source.

Korach thus drew the conclusion that if everyone is equally holy why should Moses and Aaron occupy such exalted positions that place them on a pedestal. Korach's premise was correct, his conclusion was not.

Analogy from Human Body

To understand why his conclusion was not called for, let us use the human body as an analogy.

One could argue that each and every limb of our body is equally a part of us. The brain is no more and no less a part of who we are in the physical sense than any other organ. The fact that the brain performs a much more vital function than the appendix, for example, doesn't mean that the appendix is less a part of us.

Yet, for the proper functioning of the appendix or any other organ of the human being, each organ must recognize and respect its dependency on the brain and other vital organs. If an organ wishes to be independent of

the brain and heart because of the argument, "we are all equal, the soul's energy resides within each and every organ," that would lead to a total breakdown of the human organism, and nothing would ultimately survive.

Absolutely, we must treat each and every Jew as being equal in the eyes of G-d. The correct conclusion to draw from this realization is that no Jew has a right to look down at another just because he or she has less knowledge, observance, or occupies a "lower" position in the hierarchy of the Jewish community.

But, by the same token, no individual can repudiate his or her special connection with the "heads" and "hearts" of the Jewish community; the Moses' and Aaron's, by denying their preeminent role.

If we reflect on Korach's own words, we can see how they contradicted his own conclusion. When Korach said, "All of the community is holy," he added, "and G-d is within them." Korach was absolutely right. G-d exists equally within every Jew. However, the key word here is, "And G-d is **within** them." G-d is an intrinsic part of every Jew. Even the most assimilated one has a profound, albeit mysterious and often elusive, inner connection to G-d and the Jewish people despite his protestations to the contrary.

How does one make that inner Jewish core reach the surface of our being? How does one manifest the G-dly essence into the everyday dimensions of our lives?

A Threefold Response

Judaism's response is threefold:

First, the study of Torah, which cultivates the mind and makes it receptive to the G-dly intellect embedded in our souls.

Second through the observance of the *Mitzvos*, which express our love and reverence for G-d. Thus our soul's emotional faculties are expressed.

And thirdly, we need to find our connection to the souls of other Jews, particularly, the "head" and "heart" souls. Once all the parts of the structure of our souls work together in harmony—as a result of the coordination of the brain-soul, to which we are all connected, G-d then is no longer confined to being "within" us. He is also upon us, with us and encompasses our entire being.

This Korach did not comprehend and that is why it led to the rebellion.

Korach's Quest Realized

Just as it was in those days where the Korach's had the right idea in its purist formulation–and for which reason we name the Torah portion after him, so that we learn the value of each and every Jew regardless of his or her level of observance, affiliation, scholarship, etc.–nevertheless, we must also learn how to not misapply that belief, and strengthen our connections to the Moses and Aaron of each generation.

Our belief in Moshiach, who is said to encompass the traits of both Moses and Aaron, is that he will succeed in uniting all Jews and enable them to express fully their spiritual potential. By expressing this inner spirit, the "G-d within them" will also become the G-d "outside" of them. And their outer G-dly light will also spread to the entire world. In the words of the prophet: "And the nations shall go by your light."

ESSAY THREE

HE SAW A COW

G-d not only transcends rationality; He also transcends going beyond rationality.

G-d could make something trans-rational accessible to the mind of Moses or anyone else if He so chooses.

ESSAY THREE

HE SAW A COW

Korach, a Wise Man?

Korach, a leading Jewish personality, started a rebellion against his cousin Moses. In the end, he and all his cohorts were swallowed up by the earth.

From all of the Biblical verses concerning this rebellion it is clear that he was opposed to Moses and Aaron because they occupied the two highest leadership positions. Moses was the ultimate leader and Aaron was the High Priest.

The question that is asked by virtually all of the Biblical commentators is: how could Korach who was a wise man and a distinguished personality in his own right do such a foolish thing; to start a rebellion against Moses. After all, Moses was personally chosen by G-d to bring the teachings of the Torah to them. How could Korach claim that Moses did not speak in G-d's name so shortly after he and all the Jews witnessed G-d saying to Moses at Sinai to be the one to transmit His teachings to the Jewish people?

It seems that this is what the Midrash had in mind when it asks: "What did Korach see that motivated him to rebel against Moses?" The Midrash, most likely, meant that it makes no sense for Korach to have done such a rash and foolish thing—to rebel against Moses. That is, unless, there was something that he saw that overrode all that he thought he knew about Moses.

A Puzzling Midrash

The Midrash provides a rather cryptic answer to the question. The Midrash states: "He saw the parsha of the Red Heifer." This means, Korach reflected on the section of the Torah that discusses the way a person who has become ritually defiled because they have come in contact with the dead may become ritually purified. A red cow would be taken and slaughtered, and its ashes would have to be sprinkled on the contaminated person.

What does the Red-Cow ritual have to do with Korach's revolt?

Korach's Calculation

One explanation is that Korach felt that Aaron was unqualified to be High Priest because he participated in the creation of the golden calf for which the ritual of the Red

Heifer was atonement. If the Jewish people had not worshipped the golden calf, the purifying teachings of the Torah that they had just received at Mount Sinai would have been enough to spiritually cleanse someone who had come in contact with the dead.

Moreover, according to the teachings of our Sages (Talmud, Avodah Zarah), there would have been no more death. Death was introduced into the world when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. When the Torah was given at Sinai, the contaminating effects of their sin were removed and death would have become obsolete. However, when the Jewish nation regressed at the creation and worshipping of the golden calf, death was reintroduced to the world. And since Aaron was to bear some measure of responsibility for the creation of the golden calf, Korach reasoned, how could he serve as High Priest in the Temple?

Korach reasoned further that, indeed, even Moses who was on the mountain and unaware of the golden calf incident was also adversely affected by their transgression. G-d, when informing Moses of what transpired in his absence says to Moses, "Descend." Rashi explains that this was not just a suggestion that he should go down from atop the mountain, but it is also a statement to the effect that Moses was diminished from his own exalted stature on account of their sin. "Why have I given you greatness?

Because of the people. Now that they have degenerated, you too will be diminished."

Hence Korach felt that the Moses whom G-d authorized to be His exclusive spokesman did no longer deserve to be the occupant of that position of authority. He therefore felt that Moses had appointed his brother without authorization from G-d.

G-d's Prerogative, Not Korach's

Obviously, Korach did not take into account that when G-d appointed Moses to be their leader it was forever. It was not Korach's prerogative to decide that Moses was no longer qualified to be his leader. The fact that Moses' stature was diminished because of the golden calf debacle was between G-d and Moses. Korach had no right to use that as a basis to reject Moses' role as the leader.

The Ultimate Enigma

Perhaps another explanation can be given as to the significance of the Red Heifer in Korach's rebellion.

It is well known that the Red Heifer ritual is considered to be Judaism's most enigmatic commandment. There are many contradictions and anomalies, as commentators

pointed out. The most notable example is that while it purified those who were contaminated, it contaminated some of the people who were pure. Another anomaly was the fact that it was considered an offering to G-d, yet the ritual had to be performed outside the precincts of the Temple.

The ritual of the Red Heifer was so enigmatic that even King Solomon commented "I tried to understand it and it was distant from me." Only Moses was privy to the mystery of the Red Heifer. This, our Sages say is intimated in the opening words of the section dealing with the red heifer: "And they shall take to you a red heifer." The words "to you" imply that the secret of this commandment was given over to Moses exclusively.

When Korach reflected on the inconsistencies in that ritual and how it was totally beyond any rational analysis, and that only Moses could comprehend it, it suggested to Korach that Moses had made it up himself. How could Torah be so incomprehensible that even he Korach who was so wise could not understand it? Instead of concluding that Moses was head and shoulders above everyone else, he concluded that Moses was trying to assert his own ideas and authority beyond that which G-d authorized him to do. In effect, Korach wanted to pick and choose what he would accept from Moses.

Korach knew that in Judaism there are things that we can understand and there are commandments that are beyond our intellectual capacity and that we cannot pick and choose what we like about it and reject those things that are beyond our understanding. However, he reasoned, how could it be that Moses was the only person who could fathom the secret. Either it is incomprehensible to everyone, or it can be understood by others as well.

Of course, he was wrong about that too. G-d not only transcends rationality; He also transcends going beyond rationality. G-d could make something trans-rational accessible to the mind of Moses or anyone else if He so chooses.

Korach the Visionary

There was another factor perhaps that buttressed Korach's argument. Korach, we are told was a visionary. He saw things they way they will be in the future Messianic Age. In the Messianic Age, even those teachings of Torah that are mysteries to us today, will be fully revealed; all of the elusive teachings will become comprehensible. From this futuristic vantage point Korach could not comprehend how there can be a teaching that made no sense to anyone but Moses. Korach felt that at least he should have known the reason.

Korach, with all of his flaws wanted to see the realization of the future Messianic Age. Korach's error was that the world was not yet ready for the Messianic revelation. However, today, the coming of Moshiach is long overdue and we all have the right to demand from G-d to bring an end to the exile and usher in the Redemption at which time we will be able to comprehend all of the mysteries of Torah and of life.

ESSAY FOUR

SLEEP ON IT

Think about the "morning;" reflect on the future and how your entire perspective about yourself and your ambitions will change.

We must saturate our minds with "futuristic knowledge; to the study of Torah; specifically the parts of Torah that deal with the future Messianic Age.

Our minds will emerge from the darkness of night into the light of day.

ESSAY FOUR
SLEEP ON IT

Wait Until the Morning

Korach—the name and theme of this week's parsha—started a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Korach was not happy with his role as a Levite and wanted to become a Kohain, a priest. Korach also argued that Moses and Aaron were elitists and that everyone was essentially equal, because G-d was within each and every individual.

In response to Korach's populist rebellion, Moses told him to wait until the morning when G-d will notify them who is the one chosen to lead and who is not.

Commentators ask why Moses had to wait until the morning. Shouldn't he have stamped out the rebellion as soon as it started? If Moses had G-d on his side, why procrastinate?

Rashi's explanation is that the passage of time from night to day was a stark reminder to Korach that G-d has established borders and boundaries in His world. One

cannot turn night into day or day into night. Similarly, Korach was supposed to understand that when G-d divided the families of the Jewish people into different classes—Kohain (Priest) Levi (Levite) and Yisrael (Israelite)—it was a division that cannot be changed. Each class has his or her unique responsibility and mission; and one cannot exchange it for another.

Benefit of the Doubt

Another explanation cites the Talmudic statement that if you see a Torah scholar commit an indiscretion during the day, give him the benefit of the doubt that during the night he had reflected on his actions of the day and found them wanting. He then certainly did whatever it would take to make amends and atone for those sins.

Hence, Moses also gave Korach the benefit of the doubt. Korach was a scholar and a spiritual person notwithstanding his excesses. Moses was hoping that he would utilize the night to reflect and reconsider his actions. Alas, we are told Korach did not go to sleep. Instead he was agitating all night long, trying to influence others to join his rebellion.

Soul Disengagement

A third more mystical explanation is given based on a tradition found in the Zohar that, ideally, when we go to sleep at night our souls disentangle and disengage themselves from our bodies and reconnect to their divine source. As a result, when we wake up, we wake up refreshed, not only in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual sense.

However, when a person's day is filled with activities that are not "for the sake of heaven," but driven by ego and riddled with the pursuit of glory and power, the salutary effects of a night's sleep are not realized; on the contrary. The soul discovers itself trapped in the morass of the material world that defined its pursuits during the day. The soul tries to connect to its source but discovers that it cannot. And since the soul cannot extricate itself from its entanglement with the crassness of a material existence, it cannot be rejuvenated; it possesses less energy than the day before. The soul feels drained and uninspired.

Hence if one wished to determine whether their endeavors and ambitions are guided by their quest for more goodness and holiness or by an inflated ego, they would do well to wait for the morning. If they wake up with a fiery passion for and devotion to G-d it indicates that their soul was energized during its nocturnal sojourn in the celestial

spheres. If they wake up in the morning without exhibiting a keen interest to humbly fulfill G-d's commandments and a more intense desire to connect to Him, it might indicate that their souls never left their earthly prison. It is a soul in exile.

This then is what Moses had in mind when he told Korach to wait until the morning:

> "Sleep on it. See if you have the same feelings for G-d in the morning. If your intentions were indeed pure and holy, you will wake up refreshed and enthused about your own role as a Levite and your existing relationship with G-d. You won't look to rebel."

Dawn of the Future

Perhaps we can add a fourth approach to Moses postponing the showdown with Korach to the morning.

Morning represents the dawn of the future when all of the darkness that the world is presently shrouded in will disappear. Morning is a metaphor for the future Messianic Age, when everything will become clear and radiant.

Exile is Biblically compared to the night because exile is a time of darkness and confusion. It is punctuated by inconsistency and chaos. Redemption on the other hand is

likened to the day because in that era we will see the reality the way reality truly is, not the perception of reality that governs our lives in exile.

The Stockholm Syndrome

When one is a hostage to the forces of darkness they begin to identify with it. They think the way their captors think as do hostages in the Stockholm syndrome. Not only do our lower functions become prisoners in exile, but even our mind becomes part of the exile experience.

How does one liberate oneself from this form of captivity? There are always ways of breaking out of physical shackles. An expert can pick any lock. But how does one extricate his mind from the prison it is in?

On a purely psychological level, if one is G-d forbid a hostage and fears that they will begin to identify with his captors and their way of thinking, let them just imagine being in the future after having gained freedom and returned to their families and communities. Thrust yourself into the future and that will, at the very least, keep your mind and heart in the right place.

The same can be said about our need to liberate our minds and souls form the toxic exile influences to which they are exposed. We must project ourselves into the future

Messianic Age and imagine how life will be like in that era of Redemption when G-d's presence will pervade the entire cosmos. When G-dly light will shine on every aspect of life we will so clearly see things from a different liberating perspective and the abuses that go along with an exile mentality will cease.

Just by conditioning our minds to think in terms of the future—without, obviously, ever losing touch with the needs of the present—we will feel and become fully liberated; body, mind and soul.

Moses' message to Korach thus was:

Think Morning

Think about the morning; reflect on the future and how your entire perspective about yourself and your ambitions will change.

One of the lessons from this episode that applies to us is that we must saturate our minds with "futuristic knowledge." This is not a reference to science fiction but to the study of Torah; specifically the parts of Torah that deal with the future Messianic Age. These are the parts of the Torah that discuss life in the future Age of Redemption. By doing so, our minds will emerge from the darkness of night into the light of day.

ESSAY FIVE

CONNECTING TO MOSES AND AARON

Torah is not just wisdom; it is an otherworldly wisdom. Torah is not a product of human intelligence.

Torah is G-d's wisdom. It is impossible to separate G-d from His wisdom,

How does a mortal being master the infinite Divine wisdom of Torah?

When we are person is self-effacing we can become receptive to the Divine element of Torah.

ESSAY FIVE

CONNECTING TO MOSES AND AARON

Korach's Trick Questions

Korach started a rebellion against his cousin Moses. He argued that Moses had arrogated to himself and his brother Aaron the twin powers of leader and high-priest, respectively. Korach claimed that was unjustified as all Jews were equal and each one had G-d in them. "Why do you exalt yourselves above all of them?"

The Midrash relates that Korach then posed two "trick questions" to Moses hoping to elicit a response that would force Moses to accept the premise of his argument.

The first challenge was: Does a *Talis* made entirely out of *t'cheiles*-blue dyed wool need *tzitzis*, the fringes that are required on a four cornered garment, also made of *t'cheiles*? Korach anticipated Moses would answer "absolutely not;" it would be redundant to insert fringes

made of *t'cheiles* in a garment made entirely out of *t'cheiles*. At that point, Korach planned to tell Moses: "You are the superfluous *tzitzis.* The entire nation is holy, why do they need a representative who is merely a small fringe of the nation?"

Moses, unexpectedly, answered that a *Talis* made entirely out of *t'cheiles did* indeed need to have fringes of *t'cheiles* inserted in it!

Korach then fell back on Plan B. "Does a house filled with Torah scrolls need a Mezuzah?" Here too, Korach anticipated Moses would answer that it obviously does not need a Mezuzah. As before, Korach hoped to use this to establish that a holy people, likened to a house filled with Torah scrolls, did not need a Mezuzah. Here too, Moses surprised Korach by stating that it, indeed, needed a Mezuzah.

Commentators raise the question: didn't Moses' response to the first challenge suggest that Moses would not go along with Korach's argument that the leaders were superfluous? Why then did Korach raise the second challenge after he already heard Moses' response to the first? Aren't both examples—the garment made entirely out of *t'cheiles* and the house filled with Torah scrolls—identical metaphors?

Two Arguments

In truth, the two arguments posed by Korach were intended for Aaron and Moses, respectively. Korach's challenge was directed at the two distinct forms of leadership they represented.

Korach's first disagreement was about the promotion of Aaron to the High Priesthood. The High Priest can be likened to *t'cheiles.* The root of this word is connected to another Hebrew word which denotes the most passionate love for G-d and for others. When Aaron lit the Menorah of seven branches, his heart was aflame with love. With his unbridled passion he also kindled the souls of all seven emotional classes of Jews, leading them to a state of *t'cheiles* passion for G-d.

Korach's argument was that each and every Jew possesses a holy soul, which is naturally drawn to G-d, and did not need an Aaron to ignite their spark.

Aaron did not Change!

Korach was wrong. Aaron's distinction was not only that his passion for G-d was far more intense than the rest of the nation, but his passion was unwavering. While most people experience ups and downs in their spiritual life, Aaron's passion for G-d was consistently intense.

In an earlier parsha, where the Torah relates the command to Aaron that he light the Menorah, the Torah states: "Aaron did so." Rashi comments that "this tells the praise of Aaron that he did not deviate [from G-d's command.]" Commentators are puzzled by this statement. Who would have thought that Aaron, of all people, would consider deviating from G-d's command?

However, the literal reading of that phrase is that "he did no change." This suggests that his greatness was not that he followed the command, but that his level of passion for G-d, represented by the lighting of the flames of the Menorah, was constant. He did not change. He did not experience periods when his love was suppressed.

Thus, Aaron, who did not experience the normal emotional fluctuations in terms of his love for G-d, was the only one eminently qualified to kindle the flames of all other Jews.

Whose Torah is it?

After Korach heard Moses' justification for choosing Aaron as a High Priest, he tried to delegitimize **Moses**' role as leader. Moses' leadership derived primarily from his role in transmitting the Torah to the Jewish people. Korach, therefore, contended that knowledge does not belong to the teacher. The teacher is merely the conduit through whom

the knowledge—which is G-d's—flows to the people. No one has a right to claim that Torah is his more than anyone else's.

Indeed, according to the Midrash, one of the reasons the Torah was given in a desert was to impress upon us the lesson that Torah belongs to no one in particular. Everyone is capable of receiving the Torah.

Korach therefore argued that the Jewish people are a nation imbued with the knowledge of Torah; every Jew could be likened to a house filled with Torah scrolls. What then gives Moses the right to place himself as a Mezuzah on their doorposts, implying that the Torah was his private domain? What gave Moses the right, Korach argued, to place **his** imprimatur on the **nation's** Torah?

Korach's argument was that even if we conclude that we must depend on Aaron to arouse our passion for G-d, we do not need a Moses to expose us to the wisdom of Torah. There is a qualitative difference between igniting the passion of a deadened soul or awakening a hitherto dormant emotion and using our intellect for learning. While we might need a fringe of *t'cheiles* on our garments, we do not need a Mezuzah on our doorposts, Korach contended.

While Korach certainly acknowledged that Moses was superior in knowledge to all others, Moses still had no right

to consider the Torah **his** own. He also had no right to withhold any of it because it is G-d's gift to the entire Jewish nation. Korach might even have been willing to concede that Moses deserved great respect for his job of teaching Torah to the Jewish nation and for his superior intellect and spirituality; but that is a far cry from implying that he was the proprietor of the Torah. Would a mailman who delivers important documents consider the mail to be his own and take credit for it? His job is exclusively to deliver it from the sender to the recipients.

G-d's Torah and Moses' Torah

Of course, Korach was wrong in regard to Moses as well. The Torah makes it clear that it is named after Moses, as it says: The Torah Moses commanded us is an inheritance for the assembly of Jacob." The prophet also states: "Remember the Torah of My servant Moses." While every Jew is an heir to the Torah, Moses is associated with it to an unparalleled degree.

To understand Moses' unique relationship to the Torah, we must first understand the difference between Torah and all other forms of wisdom. Torah is not just wisdom; it is an otherworldly wisdom. Torah is not a product of human intelligence. Torah is G-d's wisdom. As Maimonides writes "G-d and His wisdom are one." It is impossible to separate

G-d from His wisdom, Maimonides argues, for that would suggest that G-d is a composite of Himself and His wisdom. This would contradict the most fundamental belief in G-d's **absolute** unity.

How does a mortal being master the Divine wisdom of Torah? If Torah is Divine it is, by definition, infinite and beyond the finite capacity of a human mind, no matter how great and brilliant.

The answer is that it can happen only when a person is self-effacing and has no ego; one can become receptive to the Divine element of Torah. And since there are differing degrees of humility and ego, our ability to genuinely master the Divinity of Torah is in inverse proportion to the state of our egos.

Moses, the Torah testifies, was the most humble person ever to inhabit the earth. His humility permeated every fiber of his being and was constant. There were no fluctuations in his humble demeanor. Moses, therefore, was the only one who was able to acquire total and unequivocal mastery of the Torah in all its Divine grandeur. Moses was the ultimate Mezuzah-symbol of Torah mastery.

And when we attach the Moses-Mezuzah to our homes, and recognize that he instills within us the power of receptivity to the Torah, we too become Torah personalities. When we unearth the spark of Moses within

us and the power of self-abnegation it possesses we too can call the Torah our own. Without our connection to Moses, our connection to Torah will be inherently deficient.

The Return of Moses and Aaron

Our Sages tell us (Talmud, *Yoma* 5b) that with the coming of Moshiach, Moses and Aaron will also return. In addition to the literal meaning of "return" (they will be resurrected even before the general period of Resurrection of the Dead occurs), it also suggests that our preparation for the Messianic Era requires us to connect to the ideals of Moses and Aaron.

In the spirit of Aaron, we must ignite our souls' passion for G-d and the souls of other Jews, especially those who are unaware that they have a Divine soul.

We must also approach Torah as Divine wisdom and master it by connecting to the self-effacing and egoless approach of Moses and the Moshiach of our generation!

ESSAY SIX

MOSES IS TRUE AND HIS TORAH IS TRUE

The Chasam Sofer was puzzled by the negative sentiment of one of his community members towards him.

"I don't know why he resents me so," the Chasam Sofer asked rhetorically. "I never did him any favors..."

Taking a gift can cloud your judgment, but sometimes it might actually turn you against your benefactor, consistent with the saying "no good deed goes unpunished."

ESSAY SIX

MOSES IS TRUE AND HIS TORAH IS TRUE

Bribing G-d?

Moses' confrontation with Korach, who revolted against Moses' and Aaron's leadership, included the following exchange between Moses and G-d.

> "Don't turn to their gift-offering. I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them, and I have not wronged a single one of them."

Commentators raise several questions concerning Moses' plea to G-d:

First, why would Moses need to ask G-d not to accept their offerings? If Moses was so confident about the righteousness of his role and the utterly objectionable nature of Korach's rebellion, why would he think that they could "bribe" G-d with their offerings?

Second, what did Moses mean by saying that he had not taken anything from them? What would have been so terribly wrong if he had? We can understand that Moses' not taking anything from them pointed to his righteousness and their evil for not appreciating his selflessness. But what is the connection between taking or not taking have to do with his request that G-d refuse their offering?

Korach's Sincerity?

One can answer the first question by considering Moses' view of himself. In an earlier parsha G-d Himself told us that Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth. Being so humble, Moses might have thought that while his cause was objectively just and consonant with G-d's will, he, subjectively speaking, might not be as sincere as he ought to be. Perhaps he was seeking honor, albeit subconsciously, thus tainting the virtue of his position. In contrast, Moses thought, Korach and his cohorts might actually be sincere in their quest for more power simply because they believed more power meant more access to the Divine.

Moses pleaded with G-d that He not look at their offerings. In doing so, Moses asked G-d not to pay attention to their intention of wanting to get closer to G-d. To be sure, our feelings are crucial and an integral part of our service to G-

d. However, Moses knew that G-d wants, first and foremost, that we conform to His objective truth. In this case, G-d wanted Moses and Aaron to be the leaders of the Jewish people and He did not want anyone to challenge their position, even though "the entire nation [meaning every Jew] is holy and G-d is within them," as Korach argued.

By saying "Do not accept their offerings" Moses asked G-d to ignore their quest for greater access, even if it was sincere. He requested of G-d to overlook his possible, but unlikely, subconscious lack of absolute sincerity.

Alternatively, Moses was suggesting to G-d that in truth Korach and his supporters were not sincere in their desire to get closer to G-d; they really only wanted the secular power of leadership. Not only was their demand contrary to G-d's will, their motives were suspect.

"Why Do They Hate Me; I Never Helped Them!"

The second question, however, still remains. What did Moses mean when he said he did not take anything from the Korach group?

The answer, one suggests, is that if Moses had accepted gifts from them his judgment could have been clouded.

However, this answer flies in the face of logic. If Moses' judgment had been affected by receiving something from them, the effect would have been opposite. Feeling that he owed them something, Moses would have leaned to their side of the dispute. Why would not taking a bribe from them make him more confident that his opposition to them was unbiased?

The answer lies in a deeper understanding of human nature. When a person is on the receiving end of a favor it creates a sense of "I owe him something." To be beholden to another renders a person a debtor and no one likes to be indebted. The Talmud shows how reluctance to become a debtor translates into practical law.

This explains a comment made by the famed Halachic authority of the 19th century, the Chasam Sofer, who was puzzled by the negative sentiment of one of his community members towards him. "I don't know why he resents me so," the Chasam Sofer asked rhetorically. "I never did him any favors."

Sometimes taking a gift can cloud your judgment of the gift giver, hence the impropriety and illegality of bribes, but sometimes it can be the other way around. Giving something to another might actually turn the recipient against his benefactor. Consider if you will the rueful jest that "no good deed goes unpunished."

Moreover, the reason some might resent being a recipient of a gift is based on false pride. Many people do not want to be viewed as needing someone else's kindness; it makes them feel like a *schnorer.* Most people prefer to be givers rather than takers. Rendering others as takers can create hostility toward the benefactor for stripping the recipient of pride and dignity.

At this point we might ask why it is so that giving a gift can elicit opposite responses from people. In one person the gift can generate a sense of gratitude and closeness; in another it provokes a sense of unwanted indebtedness, maybe even shame and indignation, at being a recipient.

The differences arise from the ego. A person whose ego is in check will always appreciate the gifts of G-d and others and show gratitude for them. On the other hand, persons whose ego is inflated can respond to a gift with resentment caused by a bruised ego.

Moses, in his humility, states to G-d that, even if he had had an inflated ego, he had no reason to personally begrudge them the position of leadership because they had not bruised it. Korach and his allies hadn't done anything "nice" for Moses that might have caused him to resent them.

Three Refutations

Based on the above analysis it appears that Moses was giving three reasons to refute any possible merit in Korach's rebellion:

The first reason they might use to "justify" the rebellion is that they were sincere about getting close to G-d. To counter that argument, Moses pleads with G-d "not to turn to their offerings." The meaning of "turning" here is that G-d should focus on the objective truth and not turn away from that focus to consider the positive feelings of a rebel. Moses beseeched G-d not to accept the argument that although they are rebelling against G-d's wishes, at least they are sincere in their quest to get closer to G-d.

The second argument to "justify" the rebellion is that Moses might have been insulted by their actions and responded with a personal vendetta. To allay the suggestion that he might be upset that they put him in a position of a taker, tainting his intentions and making him less sincere than his detractors (e.g., while they wanted to get close to G-d, he wanted to avenge his bruised dignity and honor), Moses stated that he was not, in fact, a taker.

The third possible rationale for the rebellion against Moses was that he had wronged one of them and the attack on his leadership was a justified retaliation. To counter this, Moses concludes with the words, "and I have not wronged

a single one of them." This statement was designed to dispel the suggestion that his position of leadership was being challenged because he wronged one of them and this was his retribution.

Paragon of Truth

In summation, Moses did not possess even the slightest tinge of desire to pursue personal honor. Moses was the paragon of truth and, as our Sages teach us, in the end Korach and his sons declare: "Moses is true and his Torah is true and we are the liars." The reason for the repetition is that they acknowledged that truth defined Moses in terms of his subjective character as well as the objective aspect of his teachings.

Some people teach Torah truthfully but lack sincerity. Others are totally sincere but teach a distorted Torah. Moses combined Torah truth with complete sincerity.

Geulah: Synthesis of Objective and Subjective Truth

One of the casualties of Galus is the lack of subjective and objective truth. While Torah was, is and will ever be consistent and the ultimate transmitter of truth, there is still a problem with the way Torah is understood subjectively. Galus-tainted minds may learn a section of the Torah but distort its meaning. The Torah could describe

certain behaviors as an abomination, for example, but there will be some who attempt to explain away the prohibition and assert that it no longer applies in our modern day and age.

This is like the Talmud's description of one who can find 150 ways of proving that a *sheretz*-a dead rodent is ritually pure contrary to the Torah's explicit statement of impurity concerning eight types of rodents.

This teaches us that the objective truth can be compromised in Galus.

But, Galus also affects the subjective way in which we approach the Torah's teachings, even when we do not distort their essential meaning. It is true that our Sages declared that the deed, i.e., the act of the Mitzvah, is the essential thing. Moreover, they asserted that one should perform a mitzvah even if it was for ulterior motives. Nevertheless, the ideal is for us to perform the Mitzvos with integrity, sincerity and profound inner feelings. The objective truth of Torah and Mitzvos should be augmented with subjective truth.

Moshiach is a leader who, like Moses, epitomizes Torah in its most unadulterated form; combining objective truth of Torah and subjective truth. The Geulah, which Moshiach will inaugurate, will therefore expose the truth of Torah to the world. Nobody will be able or desire to distort it. In

addition, we will learn Torah and perform Mitzvos with unmitigated truth and sincerity. The synthesis between objective truth and subjective truth will be complete.

ESSAY SEVEN

NO SEPARATION

Not only is the core of Judaism derived from G-d and revealed at Sinai, but every minute detail of the Torah—from the basic laws to the most minute nuances—were given by G-d at Sinai.

Moses was endowed with the ability to touch the core of the Torah and G-d's essence.

G-d also empowered him to translate the details of the core and essence.

ESSAY SEVEN

NO SEPARATION

Another Setback

The Jewish people's 40 year sojourn in the desert was ostensibly a punishment for rebelling against the Land of Israel in the spy saga recounted in last week's parsha.

Upon deeper reflection, these 40 years were crucial to the maturation of the Jewish nation. Every setback was actually a lesson how to overcome the many reverses that we would experience in the future and enable us to reach our final destination: the Messianic Age.

In this week's parsha we learn of another setback: the rebellion against Moses and Aaron launched by their distinguished cousin Korach. As we will see, this rebellion provides us with an invaluable lesson on how we should view Torah, Moses and Moshiach.

Korach rebelled against Moses and Aaron's leadership and coveted their position for himself. In order to gain support, Korach sounded like a populist leader solely concerned with equality. Korach thus said to Moses and Aaron: "You've

made yourselves too important! For the entire congregation are holy and G-d is with them. So why have you made yourselves elite over G-d's assembly."

Disingenuous!

A question has been raised concerning Korach's populist argument. Korach was an extremely intelligent person. How could he have demanded that he should be appointed to high positions with a straight face? Korach's argument was transparently disingenuous. He argues for total equality and yet he wants to be in a position of leadership!

Another question: What precisely did Korach have in mind when he said, "For the entire congregation are holy and G-d is with them?"

Rashi explains:

> "All of them heard the words from the mouth of the A-mighty at Sinai… You were not the only one who heard at Sinai, 'I am G-d your L-rd;' The entire congregation heard."

This too is difficult to understand: How could Korach possibly suggest that the congregation was equal to Moses? While everyone heard G-d utter the first two of the Ten Commandments, only Moses heard the others directly from G-d. Moreover, the Jewish people themselves begged Moses

to transmit the other commandments to them because they were too frightened and overwhelmed by G-d's voice. How then could anyone entertain the ludicrous notion that they were equal to Moses?

The First Two Commandments

To answer these questions we must first understand the difference between the first two commandments that the entire Jewish nation heard directly from G-d and the other eight (as well as the balance of the 613 Biblical commandments transmitted through Moses).

The first two commandments, "I am G-d Your L-rd..." and "Do not have any other g-ds...," are expansive statements. They contain all of the commandments and, hence, all of Judaism. The first commandment is the source for and the root of all the positive commandments. The second commandment is source and root of the negative commandments. As the Alter Rebbe explains in his classic work, the Tanya, that when a Jew is aware of G-d's presence and grasps that nothing truly exists outside of G-d's power and light, he or she cannot possibly transgress any of the commandments because that would be a repudiation of G-d's unity.

The rest of the commandments (and all of Judaism's laws, ethics, philosophy, mysticism, etc.) are contained in the first two commandments, just as a seed contains the entire structure and future of the tree which sprouts from it.

When we compare the value of these first two commandments, those that we heard directly from G-d, with the other commandments that we heard through Moses, we can detect a qualitative difference between them. The first two commandments are all inclusive, containing infinite information. The other commandments appear to be limited to their specific role and objective.

Korach thus viewed the role of Moses as necessary but not fundamental. To him, all Jews share the core of Judaism and attachment to G-d equally. G-d's fundamental commandments ("I am G-d Your L-rd..." and "Do not have any other g-ds...") were heard by all Jews equally. In that regard they were equal to Moses.

In Korach's estimation, Moses and the rest of the congregation were essentially the same—they all shared the essence of Torah, which is one and inseparable from G-d's essence. To be sure, he was willing to concede that Moses' role of explicating, detailing and extracting their meaning was an important function but one he considered only of secondary importance. Even if Moses deserved credit for

his teaching the details, Korach argued that he did not deserve the status of a transcendent leader.

Korach, however, did not stop at that. Our Sages reveal that Korach accused Moses of making up the laws! Korach's astonishing accusation came from his erroneous belief that the specific laws Moses revealed were based on Moses' personal understanding. Moses, to Korach, was no more qualified to extrapolate from the common source than anyone else, and, indeed, in some instances he felt that Moses distorted the Torah.

Korach the Divider

Korach erred egregiously in this matter. Not only is the core of Judaism derived from G-d and revealed at Sinai, but every minute detail of the Torah—from the basic laws to the most minute nuances—were given by G-d at Sinai. Moses was endowed with the ability to touch the core of the Torah and G-d's essence; G-d also empowered him to translate the details of the core and essence.

Korach was a divider. Indeed, the very name Korach, which is cognate to the word for baldness, is related to the idea of division, the way a bald spot separates two sections of hair. It is telling that Onkeles and Rashi both translated the

opening verse of parsha "*Vayikach*" as "he separated himself."

Korach artificially separated the first two commandments from all the others; he denied the fundamental linkage between the core and the particulars. If Moses could interpret the Torah according to his own understanding, Korach reasoned, so then could every Jew apply the Torah in his or her own way. Korach argued that G-d's imprimatur was only on the essence of Torah, i.e., the first two commandments and not on the other eight (or the 613, for that matter).

"The mouth of the *Gevurah*"

This analysis might account for the unusual expression Korach used when he referred to the fact that all the Jews heard the Torah from the "mouth of the *Gevurah*-A-mighty." Why refer to G-d as "the *Gevurah"* as opposed to the more common names for G-d mentioned in the Torah?

In light of Korach's desire to separate the core of Torah from its details, we can begin to understand why he chose this name. Gevurah is associated with G-d's ability to separate the upper waters from the lower waters on the second day of Creation. Korach appropriated this attribute and misapplied it to his Torah dispute with Moses.

Korach accepted the idea that great intellects have a right and obligation to interpret the Torah, to flesh out the particulars implied by its general statements and inner core. Korach, however, felt that no one could claim that his interpretation was more authoritative than any other intellect's interpretation. To put it baldly, Korach challenged the Divine truth of Moses' teachings.

Korach was swallowed by the earth in punishment for asserting his belief. The punishment was "measure for measure." Just as Korach tried to "bury" the truth of Moses' Divinely directed transmission of the commandments, so too was he buried alive. His body was thus "separated" from the rest of society.

"Moses is true and his teachings are true."

According to the Talmud, Korach and his cohorts have renounced their opposition to Moses and now repeatedly declare from their place of punishment that "Moses is true and his teachings are true." Truth can be recognized by its consistency. Korach alleged that Moses' explication of the Torah was inconsistent with G-d's essential wisdom. The emphasis of his confession is therefore that, in fact, there is no separation between Moses' teachings and the G-dly truth of Torah.

Korachs of History

Throughout our history, Korachs have tried to separate the rabbinical laws from their Biblical counterpart. This is despite the fact that the Torah itself authorizes the rabbis to transmit, interpret and legislate. As a consequence, their teachings are no less Divine than those of Moses. To be sure, there can be differences between rabbinic law and Biblical law. For example, when there is doubt concerning a Biblical prohibition, the rabbis have ruled that one must follow the stricter interpretation. In the case of doubt concerning a rabbinic prohibition, by contrast, one may take the more lenient position. However, these differences were anticipated by the Torah itself.

Similarly, the Korach obsession with separation extends to those who seek to separate the inner mystical dimension of Torah from the external legal teachings.

Moshiach Removes Dichotomies

One of the qualities ascribed to Moshiach in Tehillim-Psalms is *emes*-truth. Moshiach epitomizes truth because like Moses before him, he does not recognize a dichotomy between the Biblical and rabbinical or between the esoteric and the exoteric. Moshiach, Maimonides writes, will restore the integrity of Torah. This suggests that Torah will not be

viewed as a fragmented work of differing levels of importance. Moshiach will instill the recognition that all segments and dimensions of Torah—despite their outward "garb"—derive from one Divine communication at Sinai.

More specifically, Moshiach will reveal the essence of Torah as has never been revealed before, and establish for all time that there is no separation between the essence of Torah and the particulars. Indeed, the Rebbe, in a historic essay (On the Essence of Chassidus), explains that the test to determine if we are connected to the **essence** of Torah is the degree to which it extends to and is manifested in the particulars. The Rebbe explains that we must prepare for this Messianic phenomenon by bringing the teachings of Chassidus (which are a foretaste of the esoteric and essential teachings that will be revealed by Moshiach) to the most remote of places. This includes taking the lofty spiritual teachings of Chassidus and translating them into a meticulous observance of all of the commandments.

ESSAY EIGHT

MOSES, KING DAVID AND MOSHIACH

Maimonides writes that it is the obligation of every Jew to participate in its construction of the Bais Hamikdash.

Yet he also writes that Moshiach will build it.

Both are true.

While we, as a people, execute the actions necessary for its construction, it is Moshiach that will make it possible for our actions to succeed.

While we also contribute the spiritual material to make the future Temple a reality, it is Moshiach's leadership role that will infuse our spiritual efforts with the requisite power to make the Temple a spiritual reality.

ESSAY EIGHT

MOSES, KING DAVID AND MOSHIACH

An Enigmatic Midrash

This week's parsha begins with the tragic story of Korach's rebellion. Korach openly challenged Moses' authority. The argument Korach used to dismiss Moses' role as leader of the Jewish people was: "The entire congregation is holy and G-d is within them; why do you lift yourselves above the congregation of G-d?"

There is an enigmatic and cryptic Midrashic comment that connects Korach's argument with King David:

"When King David saw that Korach said, 'the entire congregation is holy' he took a harp in hand and played to the words I will extol you, O G-d, for You have raised me up from the depths, and not let my enemies to rejoice over me.'"

What possible connection is there between King David's praise of G-d saving him from the depths and from his enemies' rejoicing and Korach's rebellion? And more specifically, what is the connection between King David's song and Korach's claim that "the entire congregation is holy?"

Korach's Rationale

To decipher the words of this Midrash, we must first try to comprehend how Korach could possibly think that the people were equal to Moses? Didn't he realize that Moses was head and shoulders above the rest of the congregation? Didn't he realize that Moses was uniquely qualified to be their leader after he had been G-d's instrument in liberating the Jews from Egyptian bondage? Didn't Moses split the sea and bring them to Mount Sinai and give them the Torah? Wasn't Moses the one to bring the Divine presence into the world by spearheading the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary?

Everyone is Holy!

By saying "the entire congregation is holy," Korach's argument was that Moses was not qualitatively different from all other Jews. The fact that G-d spoke face to face

with him, Korach claimed, was not unique. G-d also communicated directly to every Jew at Sinai when He declared "I am the L-rd your G-d…" Indeed, the word "your" in this verse is phrased in the singular form which denotes G-d's revelation to each and every Jew individually.

If there is any difference between Moses and the entire Jewish nation it is a quantitative difference. While G-d spoke to the average Jew face to face for only a few moments, G-d communicated with Moses in this manner for many years. If the difference is merely one of quantity, Korach reasoned, how could Moses arrogate to himself the august position of leader, as if he is on an entirely different level?

Moreover, in Korach's mind, everything that Moses did before Sinai was performed by him acting merely as G-d's instrument. Moses was only a conduit for G-d's miracles; he did not perform them himself.

But whatever distinction Moses possessed before Sinai, Korach argued, was no longer valid after Sinai when G-d created an intimate relationship with each individual Jew.

This, Korach, concluded was even truer when the Mishkan was built with the participation of every Jew. G-d declared; "Make for me a Sanctuary and I will dwell in **them**." The plural "in them" implies that the Mishkan was a collective

effort of each individual Jew. It concretized the intimate relationship that was inaugurated at Sinai.

While Korach understood that Moses was the consummate teacher who would make G-d's teachings accessible to all the Jews, that did not entitle him to assume the role of leader.

Analysis of Korach's Argument

In Korach's perspective, the Torah and the Mishkan were projects of the people. In other words, what G-d gave us at Sinai and what He revealed in the Mishkan were products of the collective and individual efforts of the people, not of one individual leader.

Korach, of course, was wrong. Moses' role was not just as facilitator and interpreter. Moses was the ultimate receptacle of G-d's light. Moses was able to fully absorb that G-dly energy and then channel it to the Jewish people. Without Moses there would be no revelation at Sinai because the Divine message of Sinai could not possibly be transmitted to human minds without Moses' first receiving the Torah, internalizing it and then transmitting it to the entire Jewish people.

The same can be said of the Mishkan. It is true that the Mishkan was a joint project of the entire Jewish nation.

However, without Moses' visualizing it on Mount Sinai and in it's construction, it could have not been built by the Jewish people themselves. Moses' contribution to the Mishkan was more than that of an advisor or coordinator. Moses was the one who endowed the Mishkan with the G-dly power it possessed and the ability it had to channel G-d's light to the whole world.

Parallel between King David and Moses

We can now understand the connection of the Korach saga with that of King David.

King David, as was the case with Moses, was maligned by his many detractors. David too suffered from rebellion. In the end, however, he was vindicated. How was King David vindicated?

According to the Talmud (Shabbos 30a), when the Holy Temple, which King David had conceived, prepared for and laid the foundation, was inaugurated by his son, King Solomon, the ceremony was interrupted. The gates would not open, signaling that G-d was not "ready" to reveal His presence there. Only after Solomon appealed to the gates to open in the honor of King David did the gates open.

This, Rashi, in his commentary on Psalm 30 states, was what prompted David to sing "for you have raised me up

from the depths." Until this event, his enemies held him in contempt and his reputation was in the depths. Only after the gates opened up in David's honor was he vindicated and "raised up from the depths."

According to the Alter Rebbe, the Hebrew word for "raised me up" *dilisani*, is related to the word *deles*, which means door or gate. This is an allusion to the opening of the gates of the Temple in David's honor that caused him to be raised up.

It is certainly true that the Holy Temple was a collective venture. It involved the entire Jewish nation. Indeed, Maimonides rules (Hilchos Beis Habechirah) that every Jew, men and women, is obligated to participate in its construction. This applied in the past and will apply to the construction of the Third Temple in the future. Yet, all of their efforts notwithstanding, the Temple's gates did not open and it could not be inaugurated until King David's name was invoked.

This is a direct parallel with Moses.

Korach argued that Moses had only a marginal role in the building of the Mishkan and in bringing the presence of G-d to it and to each and every Jew. This was the gist of his assertion that "all of the congregation is holy." His point was not to praise the congregation but to diminish Moses'

role, just as David's enemies sought to minimize his role in the building of the Beis Hamikdash.

In the end, both were vindicated. The revelation at Sinai and the building of the Mishkan with the Divine presence dwelling therein, was through, and in honor, of Moses. The building of the Beis Hamikdash was likewise through, and in honor, of King David. And while it is true that these were communal projects, the only way the Jewish community could have succeeded was through the power of Moses and King David.

Who Will Build the Third Temple? The Jewish People or Moshiach?

The same is said of the future Beis Hamikdash. While Maimonides writes, as stated, that it is the obligation of **every** Jew to participate in its construction, he also rules (Hilchos Melachim 12:4) that Moshiach (the heir to Moses and descendent of King David) will build the Temple. How do we reconcile these two apparently contradictory sources? Who will build the Temple? Moshiach or the entire Jewish people?

The answer, in light of the above, is that both are true, While we, as a people, execute the actions necessary for its construction, it is Moshiach that will make it possible for

our actions to succeed. And while we also contribute the spiritual material to make the future Temple a reality, it is Moshiach's leadership role that will infuse our spiritual efforts with the requisite power to make the Temple a spiritual reality.

The Rebbe also maintains that Moshiach will actually reestablish the gates of the Beis Hamikdash. Those very gates that King David was responsible for opening, Moshiach will put into place. This will mark and exemplify his role as the one who will make the Beis Hamikdash possible and crown all of our individual efforts with success.

The lesson for our time is that Moshiach, just like Moses and David, is not just a facilitator or a coordinator. Moshiach, through his dedication to G-d and His Torah will empower all of us to build the third Temple and experience the Redemption. Thus Maimonides rules that it is insufficient to believe in Redemption alone. One must also believe that Redemption will occur through a human Moshiach who will lead us out of exile and rebuild the Beis Hamikdash in its place.

ESSAY NINE

WHERE DO MOSES AND AARON BELONG?

We are the generation charged with the responsibility of putting the finishing touches on the magnificent Messianic edifice—a world of peace, unity and holiness.

Millennia of cumulative good, self-sacrificing dedication to the observance of the *Mitzvos* have brought this world to the point where it is about to become a "dwelling place for G-d," a place that G-d finds inviting and hospitable.

Our task is now to prepare ourselves and our families and, indeed, the entire world for this glorious time by increasing our own efforts to do more.

ESSAY NINE

WHERE DO MOSES AND AARON BELONG?

Korach's Rebellion According to the Psalms

This week's parsha features one more rebellion of the Jewish people that was directed against Moses and Aaron. Korach, Moses' cousin, claimed that Moses arrogated the role of king for himself and that of High Priest for his brother.

Korach's rebellion is recounted briefly in the book of Psalms (Psalm 106: 16): "They angered Moses in the camp, Aaron, the holy man of G-d."

The Chassidic leader Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz provided a novel interpretation of the foregoing verse which sheds light on the psychology of people who try to overthrow the current system and desire to replace it with their own. No matter what the present leaders do, the rebels will find fault.

Moses, the closest any person ever came to G-d, would spend his time in his "camp," i.e., his residence. Before the Mishkan (the portable Sanctuary in the desert) was built,

Moses' residence was the Tent of Meeting. It was from that location that G-d's words to the Jewish people would emerge. Moses who was always "on call" to receive G-d's message was, more or less, confined either to his home or to the Sanctuary. That was his "camp."

Why was Moses Always "In the Camp"?

Korach and his cohorts capitalized on this fact and ridiculed Moses for being so sequestered and detached from the community. A leader, they argued, should mingle among the people, be familiar with their needs and problems, and share their grief and joy. In order for the leader to empathize with the people he must live amongst them. Moses, Korach claimed, was aloof and distant.

Moses, whom the Torah testifies was the most humble man on the face of the earth, certainly took this criticism to heart. He therefore delegated his brother Aaron to go out into the community and identify with the people and be their mentor and a shoulder to cry on. Aaron, of course, complied. We thus have the tradition that Aaron was the ultimate peace maker. He would restore peace between husband and wife. Wherever a feud broke out, Aaron was there to make peace. He was—in the words of our Sages in Pirkei Avos—a man who, "Loved peace, pursued peace,

loved all the creatures, and brought them close to the Torah."

Aaron's Place

Rather than mollifying the rebels, they advanced a contrarian argument: A man of Aaron's caliber and one who occupied the exalted spiritual position of High Priest should not do anything that might appear undignified. He should not "degrade" himself to be among the masses. Rather, Moses' critics argued, he should be sequestered in the precincts of the Sanctuary and devote his life to higher spiritual matters. It is unbecoming, they argued, for a man of Aaron's stature to be anywhere but in Holy and G-dly places.

R. Naftali of Ropshitz thus reinterprets the foregoing verse in Psalms: "They angered Moses in the camp, Aaron, the holy man of G-d."

> "They angered Moses in the camp" means that they angered him with the charge that he was always "in the camp." They argued against his being isolated and insulated from the people—"in the camp."

"Aaron the holy one of G-d." Here too they strongly criticized Aaron, but for precisely the opposite reason. They couldn't tolerate the fact that he was **not** confined to his

own camp. They argued that Aaron should act like the "holy one of G-d" and that he should be confined to the holiest of places. Aaron should not be allowed to be with the people; he must remain aloof so that he earns the proper respect that his office demands.

The obvious lesson from the above is that jealous and rebellious people do not have to be consistent. No matter what the righteous person will do they will find fault with him or her, even if their arguments against one righteous person is diametrically opposite their complaint about the other.

Korach: A Man of the Future

Korach, our Sages tell us, was no fool. Korach was certainly a very spiritual person who possessed an extraordinary wealth of knowledge and insight. In the literature of Kabbalah and Chassidus we are told that Korach was a visionary who saw things the way they would be in the future Messianic Age. His problem was that he was attempting to prematurely bring about a spiritual revolution that was wrong for his age but right for the future.

From this premise we can conclude that Korach's arguments were not necessarily frivolous. They were just

out of touch with his time and its special needs. His sin was that he did not accept Moses' leadership and authority. He did not realize that it is Moses, the leader of the generation, who determines its particular needs. Indeed, every generation has its G-d appointed leader whose mission it is not only to inspire, but, most importantly, to tell the members of that generation what is its **particular** mission, direction and emphasis.

In light of the above, we must conclude that Korach's arguments had merit, not for his day and age but for the future Messianic Age.

As was mentioned in many of these Torah thoughts, we have been directed by the Rebbe, the Moses of our generation, that we are on the very threshold of the future Redemption and that it behooves us to live our lives in a more refined and uplifting manner, as if that Redemption has already happened.

Kosher Rebellion

Standing as we are on this threshold we may employ some of Korach's arguments, albeit in a modified way.

Korach was an anti-establishment individual. He attempted to rebel against the status quo. He was a revolutionary. Korach could not tolerate the way the system worked and

so wished to force a change, but this very attitude of his was the true source of his downfall since the system has been divinely ordained.

To be sure, the Messianic Age does not give us license to rebel against any aspect of Torah. However there are certain features that have been accepted due to our limited resources which will be refined in the Messianic Age. And it is regarding these aspects of the system that we may cautiously employ some of Korach's arguments.

As we prepare to enter into the Messianic Era, we too must become "revolutionaries," in the sense that we cannot maintain the "business-as-usual" mindset. We must radically change—not G-d forbid the teachings of the Torah—but by demanding of ourselves and our leaders that we/they make some drastic changes in our sense of where we belong in terms of our spiritual lives.

We are living in a generation that was charged with the responsibility of putting the finishing touches on the magnificent Messianic edifice—a world of peace, unity and holiness. With thousands of years of cumulative good, self-sacrificing dedication to the observance of the *Mitzvos* and unparalleled holiness we have brought this world to the point where it is about to become a "dwelling place for G-d", a place that G-d finds inviting and hospitable. And while evil still exists; it's existence is not cumulative and

penetrating unlike the good. Our task is now to prepare ourselves and our families and, indeed, the entire world for this glorious time by increasing our own efforts to do more.

No Compartmentalization

All of the thousands of years of efforts hinge on our contribution to ensure that these efforts bear fruit. We do not have time to squander. We must exploit every opportunity to make the Geulah happen now.

We cannot therefore remain sequestered in our own camp. We must go out into the world and encourage everyone to add a little bit more goodness and kindness. We must bring the message of Torah permeated with the light and love of Chassidus to everyone. One cannot afford the "luxury" of confining ourselves to the "houses of study" to enhance our own level of learning and spiritual growth. We must leave our "camp" and mingle among all Jews to awaken their knowledge of the Holy tasks awaiting us all.

Conversely, even the community leaders who are already doing a magnificent job in dealing with the day to day problems that confront our communities cannot escape the need to enter into the Holy places, by dedicating time every day for prayer and Torah study. Jewish communal leaders

have assisted and continue to heroically assist the community in so many ways, which is, of course, the way it ought to be. We do indeed need more Aaron's. But the Aarons of the world have to realize that they too have to enter into the "camp" and divorce themselves from their mere quotidian chores and envelop themselves thoroughly with holiness.

In short, the message is that we cannot afford the luxury of compartmentalizing our Jewish responsibilities. The world needs the insular "Moses" personalities to adapt to the extroverted "people's person Aaron" mode and vice versa. Korach's argument was certainly out of order then. In our day and age, Korach has a valid point.

ESSAY TEN

RIDING YOUR DONKEY!

When Moses was sent to redeem the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage he also used the donkey that symbolizes the gross physical veneer that eclipses the Divine light.

By using his donkey, Moses was underscoring the nature of exile as a cover that belies the true nature of existence.

This served as a prelude to the Exodus at which time the Jews emerged from their subservience to the physical conditions that enslaved them (read: that prevented them from expressing their true identities and potentials).

ESSAY TEN
RIDING YOUR DONKEY!

Moses' Didn't Take a Donkey!

Soon after the tragic episode of the Ten Spies who slandered the Land of Israel and dissuaded the Jews from wanting to conquer it, the Torah, in this week's parsha, discusses another tragic rebellion led by Moses' cousin Korach, claiming that Moses had arrogated too much power for himself. Moses tried to mollify them and he approached Korach's main co-conspirators the infamous Dasan and Aviram, but to no avail.

The Torah recounts that Moses upon hearing the rebellious rant of Dasan and Aviram, "was extremely upset." He then says to G-d,

> "Don't turn to their gift offering. I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them, and I have not wronged a single one of them."

These cryptic words of Moses need to be deciphered. What did Moses mean when he said that G-d should not accept their offering and that he did not take a donkey from any one of them?"

Parallelisms

According to the teachings of Kabbalah, Moses's soul was a reincarnation of Abel who was killed by Cain, whose soul was reincarnated in Korach. So now the tables were turned. Moses—who possessed the soul of Abel—brings about the death of Korach—who is in possession of Cain's soul. First it was Cain who killed Abel and now it is Abel who kills Cain!

We can find some additional parallelism in these two accounts:

In the story of Cain and Abel, G-d accepts the offering of Abel and not the offering of Cain, which provoked Cain's anger and jealousy that led to his act of fratricide. In this narrative of Moses and Korach, Moses asks G-d not to accept their offering. It appears as if Korach and his cohorts were trying to reverse Cain's failure to bring an offering that G-d would find satisfying. If Korach—the Cain incarnate—would succeed in getting G-d to accept his offering he could, once and for all, defeat Moses—the Abel

incarnate. And to preempt this, Moses asks G-d to once again not accept their offering.

Another parallel is that both Cain and Korach exhibited a strong dose of envy. Cain was envious of his brother Abel whose offering G-d accepted, and Korach was envious of Moses' and Aaron's exalted position. Moses therefore asks G-d not to accept Korach's offering because Korach was not rectifying Cain's sin of jealousy, he was reinforcing it.

But the question still persists, what connection does this have with Moses not taking donkeys from them? Why would not having availed himself of the Korach "Rent-a-Donkey" service have made any difference in this matter of G-d accepting someone's offering?

And furthermore, what was it that Korach wanted to accomplish with his offering that was an echo of Cain trying to get G-d to accept his offering.

The Purpose of Cain and Abel's Offerings

To unravel the mystery here, it is necessary for us to return to the Cain and Abel saga. What was it that prompted Cain to bring an offering in the first place? And why did G-d not accept it despite the fact that he was the one who initiated the offering; yet G-d did accept Abel's

offering even though it appeared that he was just following Cain's example?

Maimonides writes that Cain and Abel brought their offerings on the very site of the Temple mount. This, Maimonides writes was also the site that Adam offered his offering and was the site from which Adam was formed.

Desire for Exclusivity

By Cain initiating his offering he wanted to establish his exclusive relationship with G-d. He wanted to own the Temple area because he knew that it was the place that would provide him with a permanent link with the Creator and empower him to control the world of the future. In Cain's mind, whoever lays claim to the Temple mount—the very source of humanity—controls the world!

Cain was thus upset that Abel followed his example and thereby took away his exclusivity. G-d therefore rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's. Rather than learning a lesson from this that G-d did not want the offering on the Temple Mount to serve as an ego and power trip for anyone, G-d's acceptance of Abel's offering and not his, exacerbated the jealousy he had for Abel. Now Abel could lay claim to that exclusive domain and deny Cain absolute power.

And history repeats itself with Korach and Moses. Korach slyly demands equality and denounces Moses august position; although, between the lines of his diatribes, we can detect a desire on his part to become the leader himself. Consciously perhaps, Korach sought to rectify the sin of Cain by denouncing exclusive and absolute power he thought Moses craved, but sub-consciously the spirit of Cain still resonated within him.

Cain's Revenge

Korach therefore attempts to avoid making the same mistake as Cain did by demanding everything for himself; on the contrary he will show that he was a populist who wanted to bestow the special status of priesthood on all of Israel. Korach was leading a popular revolt against an oligarchy. In his mind, G-d would now be compelled to accept his offering, because it was he who cared for the rights of others. It was Moses, Korach would argue furthermore, that acted in an arrogant and presumptuous manner to arrogate to himself the position of monarch and the High Priesthood for his brother Aaron..

This was Cain getting his revenge.

And this is how Moses responds: Korach's insinuation that he was power hungry was absolutely false. To prove this

point Moses points to the fact that he would not even want to use the donkey of others. He harbored absolutely no desire for other people's property, let alone to control their lives. And if Korach was to argue that while it was true that Moses did not, in fact, covet other people's property, it was not due to his humility, magnanimity or high level of righteousness, but rather it was due to the utter contempt he had for the masses. Moses therefore follows his statement that he did not take any donkey from them with the statement that he has never harmed any of them. Moses relationship to his people was untainted with even the slightest tinge of selfishness and condescension.

Moshiach's Donkey

To explain the emphasis on not taking even a donkey from them on a deeper level, it has been suggested that the "donkey" is the symbol of Moshiach who comes to redeem the Jewish people "riding on a donkey." According to our Sages, the donkey that Moshiach will ride on is the same donkey that Moses used to travel to Egypt to redeem the Jewish people and it is also the same donkey that Abraham used to bring his son Isaac as an offering.

The simple meaning behind the longevity of a donkey is that the Messianic process involving a donkey began with

Abraham, continued with Moses, and will be completed with Moshiach.

What is the significance of the donkey in all these narratives?

The Hebrew word for donkey *chamor* is related to the word that means materialism. When Abraham proved his devotion to G-d by submitting to what he thought was G-d's will to sacrifice his son Isaac, that represented the first major dent into the gross materialistic cover that obscures G-dly light. There is no greater attachment to the physical world than the attachment of a father to a son, and by Abraham showing his willingness to give that away—which of course G-d did not really want—that was the world's first significant attempt at undermining the power of the physical world to resist the spiritual.

When Moses was sent to redeem the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage he also used the donkey that symbolizes the gross physical veneer that eclipses the Divine light. By using his donkey, Moses was underscoring the nature of exile as a cover that belies the true nature of existence. This served as a prelude to the Exodus at which time the Jews emerged from their subservience to the physical conditions that enslaved them (read: that prevented them from expressing their true identities and potentials).

However, in both of these narratives it does not state explicitly that either Abraham or Moses actually rode the donkey.

With respect to Moshiach, however, it is clearly stated in the Biblical text that he would ride the donkey. This implies that he will enable the world to finally gain total mastery over the conditions that have prevented humanity from realizing its G-d given potential. Moshiach will not have to innovate; he will just remove the final impediments that prevent the world from expressing its G-dly energy.

In all of these exercises of harnessing the "donkey" the objective was/is not to destroy it or to change it. Rather the goal is to enable the material world to realize its true nature by removing that aspect of the "donkey" that conceals that which is within.

Moses' adversaries unfortunately were of the opinion that Moses' "riding of the donkey" was an attempt to exercise his power and dominion over them. Of course, they were projecting their own ambitions of gaining power and were imputing their own motives to him.

Second, Moses' "riding of the donkey", i.e. gaining mastery over the physical and material world, was understood by the rebels as his desire to unilaterally change every one; to strip them of their individuality. Moses, they opined, was trying to change them and mold them into his chosen

image. In their minds, Moses was obsessed with controlling the people and thereby denying them their individuality by imposing on them strictures that would put them in straight jackets and never allow them to be who they truly were.

To dismiss these two concerns they had about Moses, he thus says to G-d about them: "I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them."

By saying this he meant to underscore that his efforts at raising the level of physical existence was not **his** doing. He was merely the servant of G-d who was sent to liberate the Jews from Egypt and help **them** get out of the physical and spiritual morass they were in. His role was part of a continuum, beginning with Abraham, continuing through Moses and that would culminate with Moshiach. Moses had no personal agenda and was the farthest thing from wanting to impose his personal imprimatur on anyone.

Moses was also responding to their second concern that "riding the donkey" was an attempt at denying them their individuality.

Nothing could have been farther from the truth. Moses was not there to change them at all. He was there to help them uncover their own spiritual potential by assisting them in removing the impediments to that realization due to the undue influence of their "donkeys."

Thus Moses says, "I have not taken (read: elevated) their donkey (read: their material existence), with the emphasis on the word "I". Moses was, in effect saying that it was not he that did all this; he was no more than a cog in a big wheel that was part of a Divine plan to reveal the G-dliness in this world.

And moreover, Moses was attempting to define the process of one in which there is no need for him to elevate and change the physical thereby altering its character, but to help the individual realize and actualize their own individual potential and to be who they truly are. Therefore Moses says "I did not take (read "elevate") their donkey," I gave them the opportunity to raise their own donkey by revealing its inner potential.

The Lesson of the 3rd of Tammuz

We are a few days away from the 3rd of Tammuz, the day when the Rebbe's physical presence was obscured.

The Rebbe dedicated his entire life to "riding the donkey," refining the world and preparing it for the Messianic Age in the tradition of all the great Jewish leaders beginning with Abraham and Moses.

One of the striking features of the Rebbe is that—in the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the chief Rabbi of

England—"he did not cultivate followers, he cultivated leaders." The Rebbe's multifaceted teachings and efforts were directed at aiding the individual to "raise up" their own "donkey," by discovering the treasures within each and every person. People believed in the Rebbe not only because of his incredible love, care and concern for them but because he demonstrated how much he believed in them.

The Rebbe would often cite the teaching of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement that every one of us possesses a "spark of Moshiach" within. The Rebbe's life was/is dedicated to helping us reveal that spark so that in the aggregate, with the confluence of all these sparks, they will become a blazing torch that will lead inevitably, inexorably and imminently to the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY ELEVEN

INFERIORITY/SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

The Talmud states that the entrance to Gehinnom is in the desert.

The desert is the symbol of emptiness and desolation.

When one loses self-respect, overwhelmed by the perception that he or she is insignificant, it can cause the Jew to degenerate and descend to the abyss—the entrance to Gehinnom.

ESSAY ELEVEN

INFERIORITY/SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

Entrance to Gehinnom

Korach, Moses' cousin, symbolizes rebellion and discord, two of the most egregious and destructive forms of behavior.

Korach's punishment, as recorded in this week's parsha, was for him, his family and all his cohorts and their belongings to be swallowed up in the earth. In the words of the Torah: "They and all that was theirs descended alive to the pit..."

The word "pit" in this verse is understood by our sages to refer to Gehinnom, the Jewish version of hell. Gehinnom is usually understood to mean a purification process for the soul after it separates from the body. Korach, the arch rebel, obviously needed to go through this purification process.

In a cryptic passage (Eiruvin 19), the Talmud makes reference to three entrances to Gehinnom: "One was in the desert, one in the sea and one in Jerusalem." The existence

of an entrance to Gehinnom in the desert, the Talmud states, is derived from the abovementioned verse: "'They and all that was theirs descended alive to the pit…"

The sages were obviously attempting to impart a moral lesson from the Biblical references to Gehinnom. There are three places or mindsets that can become the entrances to this nether place. In this essay we will focus on the entry/mindset to Gehinnom that is in the desert. This is the mindset that caused Korach to rebel.

The Vast and Dreadful Desert

The desert the Jews were in and that provoked Korach's rebellion is described in the Torah (Devarim 8:15) in the starkest of terms: "the vast and dreadful desert, with serpents, vipers and scorpions, and of thirst, where there is no water."

The Rebbe (Likkutei Sichos, volume 2) explains that this description is a metaphor for the present period of Galus. The vastness of the area of desolation is a metaphor for a Jewish person's sense of isolation. The Jew in exile sees himself or herself as living in a world that is not habitable for the Jew. The Galus Jew sees his Jewishness as an aberration from the world at large and seeks to be like the rest of the world. The Jew fails to recognize that he or she

is a member of the Chosen People; chosen to be a "light to the nations" and not the other way around.

This, then, is what the Talmud means when it states that the entrance to Gehinnom is in the desert. When one loses self-respect, overwhelmed by the perception that he or she is insignificant, it can cause the Jew to degenerate and descend to the abyss—the entrance to Gehinnom.

The question, however, can be asked, how does this tie in with Korach's rebellion? Korach did not seem to be suffering from an inferiority complex. On the contrary, he suffered, it seems, from a robust superiority complex. Korach sought to unseat Aaron and Moses and arrogate the leadership of the Jewish nation to himself. Why would the desert/inferiority complex mentality discussed above have precipitated his downfall? The appropriate metaphor for Korach could have been a mountain not a pit!

Korach's Devaluation of Everything

In truth, Korach's bluster and arrogance was not a product of a superiority complex but of his lack of understanding of what happened at Mount Sinai and devaluation of the true value of Torah, the Jewish people, Moses and Aaron and even of his own spiritual role.

In Korach's mind, the Torah was a Divine source of guidance for society. To keep the world from degenerating into anarchy there must be an ideal system of government. To guarantee that there is equality and equity in society, we must have a system of government that is not subject to the biases and caprices of humans. G-d therefore gave us the Torah, which is an infallible system of laws, to protect society.

Korach also recognized the need for the observance of the Mitzvos that deal with our relationship with G-d. However, he considered them as mere symbolic actions that help remind us of our obligations.

The Midrash relates that Korach challenged Moses by asking whether a house filled with Torah scrolls required a Mezuzah. In his mind, the Mezuzah functioned as a reminder of G-d's authority. Why does one need a mere symbolic **reminder** of G-d's authority, contained in a Mezuzah, when the entire house is filled with Torah scrolls that speak of G-d's role in our lives in vivid detail? Korach's challenge question to Moses revealed his limited understanding of the nature of Torah and its Mitzvos.

Korach viewed the Mitzvos given at Sinai as extensions of the Seven Noahide commandments that were given to all of humanity after the Flood. These commandments were essential to ensure stability and civility in society. The

difference between the Seven Noahide commandments and the 613 commandments given at Sinai, in Korach's mind, was merely quantitative. In addition, he believed that G-d chose the Jewish people simply to be the managers of the Divine legal system, and the Jewish leaders were no more than His upper level mangers and Torah-technocrats. To Korach, Moses was the CEO of the Jewish nation whose job it was to ensure compliance with the dictates of the Torah.

In Korach's mind there was nothing transcendent about Judaism or about Moses and Aaron. Despite the fact that Korach argued "all of the Jewish people are holy and G-d is within them," he did not see anything that would render them particularly special. He certainly did not recognize that any special status had been conferred on Moses and Aaron.

Thus, in a subtle way, Korach was indeed a product of a "desert-inferiority complex." He saw the role of Moses, Aaron, the Jewish people as extensions of all the other nations of the world and the Mitzvos as extensions and amplifications of the Noahide laws given to the other nations. Korach certainly could not countenance the notion that Moses and Aaron were infinitely more receptive spirituality than he was or that they were qualitatively on an infinitely higher level of spirituality.

His failure to appreciate the uniqueness of Moses and Aaron stemmed, ironically, from his failure to appreciate his own uniqueness.

The Mother of All Revolutions

In truth, what happened at Sinai was an unprecedented G-dly revolution. It revolutionized the magnitude of G-d's revelation to the world. It revolutionized humanity's understanding and appreciation of G-d's utter transcendence. It revolutionized G-d's relationship with the physical, demonstrating how the spiritual and the physical are not mutually exclusive entities. It revolutionized the concept of how a Mitzvah is not merely a device to make us more aware of and sensitive to our obligations, but is also the channel of Divine energy into the world. The revelation at Sinai enables the world to realize its very *raison d'être*—to be transformed into a dwelling place for G-d. It revolutionized our view of the Jewish soul and the notion of a Chosen People. The Jew is a conduit to bring G-d's presence to the world through his or her performance of the Mitzvos. Sinai also revolutionized how we view the role of Jewish leaders. They are not just teachers who guide, inspire and uplift the people; they are the "head souls" who channel Divine energy to the entire

Jewish nation in the same manner the brain energizes the entire body.

A desert mentality is not exclusively reserved for those who suffer from an acute inferiority complex, thinking they are worthless. It also affects those who underestimate their own significance. These people suffer from the Korach syndrome and will also underestimate the value of others. Tragically, the road to Gehinnom is paved with the failure to appreciate our own uniqueness. Minimizing our importance or selling ourselves short can have the same tragic consequence as an unhealthy inferiority complex.

We are Special

There are many lessons we can learn from Korach's ill-fated rebellion.

One lesson especially relevant to our times is that we too suffer from an inferiority complex.

There are some who misapply Talmudic statements about the relationship between our generation and our forebears. While we are indeed spiritually inferior to bygone generations in some areas, we enjoy superiority over them in many other significant ways.

First, we are the beneficiaries of all of their past greatness. We have been compared to the dwarf standing on the

shoulder of the giant who can see farther than the giant precisely because he enjoys the giant's height in addition to his own.

Second, despite the tests and trials to which the last few generations have been subjected—both in terms of persecution and the pressures of assimilation - we have, as a people, tenaciously held on to Judaism. This makes us unique even in regard to the greatest and most noble souls of the past.

Third, we have been given a taste of the future Messianic revelations in preparation for the future Redemption, when all the fountains of G-dly knowledge will be accessible to us. This "foretaste" is contained in the teachings of Chassidus and has been fed to us by the unprecedentedly lofty souls of the great tzadikim of the recent past, most notably from the souls of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the other Chassidic Masters through our Rebbe, who have introduced unprecedented G-dly knowledge and kindness to the world.

Fourth, the great Kabbalist, the AriZal, writes that the last generation of exile is a reincarnation of the generation that left Egypt and witnessed the revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai. In light of the Rebbe's pronouncement that we are the final generation of Galus and will be the first generation of Geulah, it is we who are the reincarnation of that lofty generation. (All of the negative features of that

generation have long since been expunged leaving only the positive energies in their souls that we have inherited.)

Finally, as the Rebbe stressed on many occasions, we have already witnessed some of the events and miracles associated with the future redemption which serve as a sample and the beginning of Moshiach's efforts to change the world. The Rebbe referred specifically to the miracles of the first Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Empire in this regard.

With all of the incredible spiritual wealth that we possess we must not underestimate our ability to change the world and usher in the final, true and complete Redemption.

ESSAY TWELVE

BITTERSWEET OR SWEET BITTER?

Defeat of your enemy is sweet and gets the adrenaline flowing. But in the end, the quarrel turns ugly, and it destroys the lives of so many.

What starts sweet turns very bitter.

Pursuit of peace, by contrast, can be disconcerting and unpleasant. The very thought of not prevailing in what one thinks of as a just cause is frustrating and bitter. But the end result is sweet and pleasant.

The peace and harmony that one begins to experience is beautiful and exhilarating.

ESSAY TWELVE

BITTERSWEET OR SWEET BITTER?

Discord is Odious

Discord in our community is one of the tragic features of Jewish life that unfortunately existed from the very beginning of the history of our nation.

This week's Torah portion, Korach, highlights the ultimate and prototypical schism within the Jewish community. Korach, Moses' cousin and one of the distinguished members of the Israelite society in the post-Exodus period, started a rebellion against Moses. His claim was that Moses had taken the most important positions of leadership and given them to his brother Aaron and others and denied Korach his rightful position in the hierarchy of Jewish leadership. Korach, felt that he was entitled to one of these positions of honor and was prepared to fight Moses. Their misguided rebellion was abruptly terminated when G-d

miraculously had the earth swallow Korach and his followers.

The entire tragic episode of this rebellion is recorded in the Torah to underscore the horrors of internal discord. According to some legal authorities, there is a Biblical commandment, based on this week's parsha, not to follow in Korach's footsteps. We are enjoined to do everything to avoid strife and to ensure peace.

Internal discord and strife is so odious that in the thick of the rebellion, Moses' made every effort to convince Korach and his cohorts to desist. From this, our Sages deduce, one should never allow a dispute to fester. Every effort should be made, whenever and wherever possible, to "nip it in the bud" and prevent it from leading to a disaster.

After Korach met his bitter end, G-d told Moses to have twelve staffs deposited in the Sanctuary, one representing each of the twelve tribes. Aaron's staff sprouted almonds overnight. This was the miraculous sign that Aaron was indeed chosen by G-d to be the High Priest.

The Proof is in the Almonds

One can ask why were almonds chosen as the symbol for to vindicate Aaron? Second, why was there a need to

vindicate Aaron after everyone had clearly seen what happened to Korach and all of his supporters?

One answer is that it was not just intended to demonstrate that Aaron was the rightful person for the position of leadership, but that his ascension to leadership was associated with the blessing of the Jewish people. The speed with which the almonds grew was an illustration of the way G-d's blessings were channeled to the Jewish people through Aaron and the other Kohanim (priests). This provided a vivid contrast with Korach's brand of leadership that ended precipitously and catastrophically.

Two Brands of Almonds

There is another approach as to why almonds were used as the symbol of Aaron's vindication that was given by a prominent rabbinic figure when he was asked to mediate between two parties in a bitter fight.

The Talmud tells us that there are two kinds of almonds. One brand is bitter in the beginning but then becomes sweet in the end. The other is the reverse: It is initially sweet but then turns bitter.

The same can be said about discord and peace. When a fight breaks out, each side feels the need to be victorious. Defeat of your enemy is sweet and gets the adrenaline

flowing. But in the end, the quarrel turns ugly, and it destroys the lives of so many. What starts sweet turns very bitter.

Pursuit of peace, by contrast, can be disconcerting and unpleasant. The very thought of not prevailing in what one thinks of as a just cause is frustrating and bitter. But the end result is sweet and pleasant. The peace and harmony that one begins to experience is beautiful and exhilarating.

By having Aaron's role vindicated through the growth of almonds, the Torah wants to tell us how we should view the role of strife and peace. Indeed, Aaron was identified by Hillel in Ethics of the Fathers as the ultimate peace maker: "Be from the students of Aaron. Love, peace, pursue peace, love all creatures and draw then near the Torah."

Two Applications of the Almond Metaphor

We also find in Prophetic literature the symbol of almonds used in conjunction with the Three Weeks (beginning on the seventeenth of this month of Tammuz), that mark the period from the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem to the destruction of the Holy Temple.

And here again the message should resonate: Whether the Temple is ultimately destroyed or rebuilt depends on whether we appreciate the metaphor of the almonds.

Pursuing peace and unity (the opposite of the manner which characterized Jewish life prior to the destruction of the second Temple) will produce the "sweet almonds."

And while the pursuit of peace and the rejection of discord and dissonance is the vessel for all of G-d's blessings, as is stated at the very end of the Mishnah, it is especially conducive for the realization of the ultimate and all-encompassing blessing, the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Third Beis Hamikdosh, Holy Temple.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

ATTACHMENT

Korach began as a righteous and learned individual who did not, however, see the need to subordinate himself to Moses and be a part of the organic unit of the Jewish people.

By doing that he severed his ties from the very source of his G-dly energy.

Once he was deprived of the Divine energy his "oxygen" starved soul began to "hallucinate."

Now, Korach was having delusions of grandeur, even as he was headed for total self-destruction. By disassociating himself from the spiritual compass, Moses, Korach could no longer think and act rationally.

ESSAY THIRTEEN
ATTACHMENT

Korach "took" Himself

Korach, Moses' cousin, for whom this week's Parsha is named, started a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. The Torah introduces this narrative with the words "And Korach took." The Torah does not say what it is that he took. Thus, *Targum Onkeles,* the authoritative Aramaic translation of the Torah, cited by Rashi, renders this as "And Korach separated himself." The simple meaning of this is that Korach started a rebellion against Moses.

One can ask a simple question. Why couldn't the Torah simply begin with the actual account of the rebellion, which begins in the next verse? After reading what Korach and his cohorts said to Moses, it will become obvious to the reader that Korach had started a rebellion.

To answer the question one must analyze the dynamics of Korach's rebellion and contrast it with other forms of rebellion

Two Forms of Revolution

There are times when a revolution occurs, because of principles that some individuals have that go against the ideals held or not held by the establishment. These rebels may be truly motivated by their concern for the welfare of their country or some other ideal. They then seek likeminded idealists who are prepared to fight for their cause. In its nascent state, these rebels are very much a part of the society which they try to change. Only after they advance their positions and are rebuffed by the establishment, do they become branded as rebels who have severed their ties with the ruling powers.

Korach's rebellion, the Torah intimates to us by the opening phrase "And Korach took," started not with an ideal or even with a disagreement. It began with Korach detaching himself from Moses and separating himself from the G-d given structure of authority that was vested in Moses and Aaron. Once that occurred, it was only a matter of time for Korach to find the ideals and arguments that would rationalize his separation and rebellion.

In other words, there are times when a disagreement may generate a rebellion and there are times when a rebellion generates a disagreement. Korach's rebellion was of the latter category.

But we have to understand, what was so wrong if Korach set himself apart from Moses. True, it was not the most humble thing to do, but as long as he did not act contrary to Moses' instructions, it should not have led to such dire consequences.

Clinging to a Sage

The answer to this lies in a Talmudic dictum: "One who clings to a sage is as if they cling to G-d." Kabbalistic and Chassidic thought interpret this by referring to the metaphor of the human body which is an organic unit comprising distinct organs, with the heart and brain generating life to the rest of the body. Similarly, the souls of all the Jewish people are part of one organic structure, guided and energized by the "brain" and "heart" souls — the Torah leaders of every generation. When one realizes that their soul is but part of an entire structure of souls and that their vitality derives from its head and heart, one is not only going to be more humble, but they can see the larger picture and all of their efforts will be harnessed in

the pursuit of the goals that will benefit the entire Jewish people.

Conversely, when one separates oneself from this structure and no longer feels the need to be part of the Jewish community and be guided, inspired and given spiritual energy by Moses, they will inevitably lose their sensitivity to the G-dly energy in them. Consequently, their efforts will not be in sync with the needs of the Jewish community that were dictated by G-d.

Let us return to Korach. Korach began as a righteous and learned individual who did not, however, see the need to subordinate himself to Moses and be a part of the organic unit of the Jewish people. By doing that he severed his ties from the very source of his G-dly energy. Once he was deprived of the Divine energy his "oxygen" starved soul began to "hallucinate." Now, Korach was having delusions of grandeur, even as he was headed for total self-destruction. By disassociating himself from the spiritual compass, Moses, Korach could no longer think and act rationally.

The Moses of Our Generation

In every generation there is a Moses, a selfless Jewish leader, whose inspiration literally energizes the souls of all

Jews. It behooves us, the diverse — but integrated — organs of the Jewish community to follow in his footsteps.

Our generation was blessed with such a leader — the Lubavitcher Rebbe — whose unconditional love and devotion for every Jew, qualified him as our generation's Moses.

The third of *Tammuz* is when we were denied the ability to physically see the Rebbe. Yet, we continue to look to him for our guidance and spiritual inspiration. While the Rebbe treasured any and every effort of goodness, kindness, Torah study and *Mitzvos* observance, the Rebbe's most powerful message to our generation is that it is the last generation of exile and will be the first generation of Redemption.

By increasing all of our efforts in performing acts of goodness, kindness, Torah study and *Mitzvos* observance with the focus on living our lives in a "Moshiach" (I.e., more wholesome and spiritually enhanced) way, we will be able to hasten this process.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

CONNECTING THROUGH OUR LEADERS

In our generation, the Lubavitcher Rebbe stands out as the "Moses" of our generation in the way he led/leads the Jewish people and the direction he charted for us.

The Rebbe rebuilt the spirit of the Jewish people in the Post-Holocaust era.

With optimism, love for everyone and selfless devotion to lead us towards the ultimate goal of bringing Moshiach and the final Redemption, the Rebbe succeeded in changing the face of Jewry throughout the world.

The Rebbe accomplished all of this by seeing the good in each and every one of us and by helping us tap our own individual talents and inner spirituality, so that we can fully actualize our potential.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

CONNECTING THROUGH OUR LEADERS

What did He Take?

Korach was a rebel, who fought against Moses. His main argument, as it appears in the Torah, is that "all of the people are holy, why should you [Moses and Aaron], exalt yourselves above the community of G-d."

When the Torah introduces Korach's rebellion it states

> "And Korach took—the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehos, the son of Levi—together with Dasan Aviram."

All of the commentators raise the question of the awkwardness of this verse: It states that he "took," but it doesn't say what he took.

Rashi explains that the word "took" means that he took himself away from the rest of the community by starting this rebellion. Alternatively, Rashi explains, it means that he

took with him some of the most influential people with him in this act of treason.

The Midrash explains that the words "and he took- *Vayikach*" has the connotation of a purchase. "He made a bad purchase for himself" by starting this rebellion, for in the end, not only was his cause not accepted by G-d, he ended up being swallowed by the earth.

The difficulty with all of these explanations is that the phrase "and he took" implies that he took something, yet nothing else but his genealogy is mentioned in the text. Why doesn't the Torah state clearly what he took?

Don't Take Yourself Too Seriously

Upon reflection one can answer that indeed, that was the problem with Korach. He did not take anything or anyone with him; he just took himself, and he took himself too seriously.

This conveys two points:

First, there are people who are self-absorbed. Even when they get other people to join their efforts, they still remain essentially preoccupied with their own honor and agenda, not really caring and connecting to his allies. This can also be the meaning of the Midrash: "He made a bad purchase for himself." The Midrash actually means that the "bad

purchase" was "himself," i.e., the viewing of himself as the ultimate and exclusive consideration in all of his dealings.

Second, Korach was of the opinion that he was not in need of a leader and mentor. When he complained about Moses' leadership role using the argument that "all of the people were holy," Korach was not taking up for the rights of the people. Rather it was his way of saying, "I don't need Moses as my leader and guide. I am holy myself and can connect with G-d without the aid of any other person, including Moses."

Humans Cannot go it ALone

To buttress his independence of anyone else, the Torah thus continues to trace his ancestry. Korach meant to say that his distinguished pedigree provided him with superior qualities, enabling him to reach G-d without ay intermediaries.

Korach was obviously mistaken. G-d established a world in which humans cannot go it alone. We depend on our alliances and connections to others.

This does not reflect any weakness on our part; on the contrary, it is an expression of maturity to know how we are part of a larger picture, and that our individual contribution depends on our connections with others, but

that others also depend on us. This idea of interdependence really speaks to our uniqueness that we—with our own little niche—can affect that entire picture.

Wrong on Two Counts

Korach was thus wrong on both counts. By separating himself from the rest of the community—even from his own cohorts—Korach was denying himself all of the resources that G-d placed at our disposal. And by denying his need to be directed by Moses, he was also severing his connection to G-d who chose Moses to be his—and all of Israel's—leader.

The need for connecting to others and to one's leader has often been explained by way of the analogy to the human body. A human body is healthy only when all of its organs work together harmoniously. To make that possible, all of the organs must be connected to the brain.

The leaders that G-d has chosen represent the brain of the Jewish people. Only by connecting to our teachers and mentors can we fully actualize and enjoy our own individual contribution. This explains the importance Jewish tradition—from Biblical and Talmudic times onward—has placed on following and connecting to our leaders and teachers of Torah.

The Moses of Our Generation

In our generation, the Lubavitcher Rebbe stands out as the "Moses" of our generation in the way he led/leads the Jewish people and the direction he charted for us. The Rebbe is committed to rebuilding the spirit of the Jewish people in the Post-Holocaust era. With optimism, love for everyone and selfless devotion to lead us towards the ultimate goal of bringing Moshiach and the final Redemption, the Rebbe succeeded in changing the face of Jewry throughout the world. The Rebbe accomplished all of this by seeing the good in each and every one of us and by helping us tap our own individual talents and inner spirituality, so that we can fully actualize our potential.

As we approach the third day of Tammuz this coming week—the day that the Rebbe's presence was concealed from us—it is appropriate for us to reflect on the lesson from Korach and to solidify our connection with the Rebbe, the Moses of our time. This we do by following in his way of seeing the good and holy in everyone and by actualizing that goodness and holiness by greater devotion to Judaism.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

TRUTH

Truth in Hebrew is *Emes*, which possesses a much deeper meaning than just the negation of a lie.

Emes, the Jerusalem Talmud informs us, contains the first, middle and last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Emes is more than just being truthful, but total consistency.

Moses was unique because his subordination to G-d was so absolute that he had surrendered his ego to G-d and did not have a vested interest in anything. His interests had become G-d's interests.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

TRUTH

"Moses is True and His Torah is True"

Korach was Moses' cousin. He was a distinguished personage and, according to our sages, quite wealthy and powerful.

All of his knowledge, wealth and power were not enough for Korach He started a rebellion against Moses, stating that Moses had arrogated to himself and his brother Aaron, positions of power. Moses' protestations to the contrary, that his nomination of Aaron as the High Priest was made at the behest of G-d Himself, fell on deaf ears. Korach and his cohorts simply did not believe that G-d had so instructed Moses. They were convinced that Moses fabricated the story that G-d commanded him to appoint Aaron to his position of power.

The Torah then recounts the tragic end of Korach and his followers; they were swallowed up by the earth and perished. Our sages add that their souls, realizing their fatal mistake to challenge Moses' integrity, declare: "Moses

is true and his Torah is true; we are the fabricators."

Moses epitomized the trait of truth and integrity, precisely because his essence was intertwined with the Torah that he had given the Jewish people. The prophet, in fact, identifies the Torah as the Torah of Moses. In the Book of Deuteronomy, the Torah is described as having being commanded to us by Moses.

One can raise a question about the order the Korachites used in describing Moses commitment to truth. They first said Moses was true and then they said that his Torah was truth. Shouldn't it have been the other way around? "The Torah is true and therefore Moses [who was totally committed to the] Torah is true?"

The Truth about Truth

The answer lies in the nature of the word truth. Truth in Hebrew is Emes, which possesses a much deeper meaning than just the negation of a lie. Korach was not necessarily accusing Moses of outright fabrication, but of coloration. After all, Korach, reasoned, just as I am human and I have vested interests, so is Moses a human being with vested interests. Inevitably, Moses would have to interpret G-d's directives to him in a way that is favorable to his own family and interests. Perhaps, Moses imagined that G-d

wanted him to appoint his brother Aaron.

Korach was wrong and in the end recognized that first and foremost Moses was *Emes*. *Emes*, the Jerusalem Talmud informs us, contains the first, middle and last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This means that *Emes* is more than just being truthful, but total consistency. Inasmuch as no human can be totally consistent, Moses was unique because his subordination to G-d was so absolute that he had surrendered his ego to G-d and did not have a vested interest in anything. His interests had become G-d's interests.

Korach thus realized that first, "Moses was absolutely *Emes*, and therefore the Torah that he taught was *Emes*, there were no inconsistencies or biased views, or subjective coloration of the Torah by Moses.

Moses in Our Generation

In every generation, our sages say there is a Moses whose dedication to the ideals of Torah parallel that of Moses. In our day and age, many hundreds of thousands of Jews have recognized the Lubavitcher Rebbe as the Moses of our generation. It is not surprising that among the many praise heaped upon him is the one of *emes*, absolute truth and consistency that derives from a devotion to G-d and Torah

in an ego less manner.

This *Shabbos*, the third of Tammuz, is the fourth anniversary of the day in which we were denied the ability to see and hear the Rebbe. However, in light of the Rebbe's identification with *Emes*-consistency that could never wane or waver, the Rebbe and is teachings are very much alive. Most significantly, the Rebbe's "campaign" to prepare us for the redemption can certainly not have changed.

The Rebbe has declared that "the time of your Redemption has arrived!" "Our mission now is to add more goodness and kindness," so as to hasten the Redemption and be prepared for it. The Rebbe, whose emphasis on providing a Jewish education for every Jew is legendary, also exhorted us to intensify our study of Torah in general and the topic of Moshiach and Redemption in particular. The objective of this enhanced learning program will be to internalize the ideals of Redemption and thereby making us more spiritually sensitive and refined.

No Compromises of Truth

In all of the Rebbe's teachings that fill over 200 volumes published to date, the Rebbe has never wavered — in the spirit of *Emes* — in his insistence that we accept and love every Jew regardless of their level of commitment,

observance and affiliation. While never compromising on Torah ideals, the Rebbe would never compromise on the unconditional and unmitigated love for everyone. This expression of Ahavas Yisrael, is the catalyst that will make the Redemption possible and peaceful. May we all merit to see the Rebbe's aspirations and ideals realized in the most immediate, complete and literal fashion.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Convention requires looking at the past and learning from the good of our forebears, as well as from their mistakes.

Korach, however, introduced a novel approach to our pursuit of truth and righteousness.

We should behave today in ways that are consistent with the future.

While we must reject Korach's attempt at justifying the means because of the end, we can and must learn from Korach to base our commitment to good on the future, not just on the past.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE FUTURE IS NOW

"One of history's lessons is that we don't learn any lessons from history."

One of history's lessons is that we don't learn any lessons from history. This truism appears to be the only explanation for the rebellion of Korach against Moses, the highlight of this week's Parsha.

Didn't Korach know what happened week's or perhaps even days earlier, when the spies returned from Israel and attempted to stir up a rebellion against Moses for wanting to take them to the Promised Land? Didn't Korach and his followers know the horrible fate that they suffered? The ten spies themselves all died in a plague and all of their coconspirators (all the men from the age of 20 through 60) were destined to die in the desert — never to see the Promised Land.

How then could Korach have not learned the lesson from the immediate past history and dared to start another rebellion?

True, this question can be asked about every generation that fails to learn from the errors of its predecessors. And the generic answer to this question is that we always convince ourselves that our situation differs from the historical precedent.

But, even this explanation can hardly be applied to a man, the likeness of Korach, concerning whom our sages declared that he was a brilliant and perceptive man.

Korach's Vision

Our Sages tell us that in Korach's case, it was actually his keen insight and foresight that led do his downfall; Korach's perception bordered on prophecy. He "saw" prophetically that his descendent, the prophet Samuel, would be one of Jewry's greatest leaders. "Obviously," Korach thought, "If I am to become the progenitor of a man of such stature, I am destined to be vindicated for my efforts here on behalf of the Jewish people."

Here we have a rather novel approach to the art of rationalizing. Many people who commit undesirable actions will rationalize their behavior by relying on past behavior.

Whether it is the exemplary behavior of their forebears or their own record of great accomplishment, good people who stray usually feel that their errant behavior now will be overshadowed by the good — and good will — they have accumulated by virtue of their own or their ancestors' achievements.

Korach forged a new path to justifying his rebelliousness. Korach justified the actions he took because he knew that they would lead to positive results. Most people who are not prescient do not have the "luxury" of knowing the future rely on the past for their peace of mind. Korach was indeed unique.

Ahead of his Time

According to the teachings of Kabbalah, Korach was ahead of his time. He realized that ultimately, in the Messianic Age, the Levite will rise to a greater level than the Kohain. His mistake was that that time had not yet arrived and that his desire to rise to higher levels of prominence was premature. Once again, Korach's mistake was based on his ability to see into the future.

Whatever is true in the realm of evil and negativity is paralleled in the realm of goodness and holiness. Just as there are two approaches to making the wrong choices,

there should be two approaches to making the right choices:

The conventional approach involves looking at the past and learning from the good of our forebears, as well as from their mistakes. Korach, however, introduced a novel approach to our pursuit of truth and righteousness. We should behave today in ways that are consistent with the future. While we must reject Korach's attempt at justifying rebellious activity on the basis of the positive outcome in the future — the ends do not justify the means — however, we can and must learn from Korach to base our level and manner of commitment to good on the future, not just on the past.

Project into the Future

In simple terms this means that we should learn what the Torah says what the world will be like with the coming of Moshiach. We should try to appreciate the greatest heights that we will ultimately achieve, and then try to experience some of that in the present. While, traditionally, the emphasis has been placed on trying to recapture the innocence, holiness and dedication of our forebears, Korach's positive contribution was that we ought to base our behavior today on the anticipated achievements of the future. Rather than wait for the distant future, we act

today in consonance with the heightened level of the future Messianic Age; an age that will be characterized by peace, unity, love and awareness of G-d. .

Naming Rights

We can now appreciate why the Torah deemed it appropriate to name this week's Parsha Korach, notwithstanding the evil he committed.

In light of the above, naming the Parsha after Korach is intended not to legitimize his actions, but to legitimize his "futuristic" approach to life. Always look to the future and seek out the highest ideals, and implement them into the present.

While we ought to repudiate Korach's divisive tactics, i.e., his rebellion against G-d and Moses, we should incorporate his sense of "acting now on the basis of the future," into our lives.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

GO SEE YOUR OPHTHALMOLOGIST, *NOW!*

T'cheiles, the blued dyed wool, related to the word that means to be consumed, we are taught in Kabbalah and Chassidic literature, represents the height of spiritual ambition, where one is totally consumed in his pursuit of spirituality.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

GO SEE YOUR OPHTHALMOLOGIST, *NOW!*

Tzitzis: Exhibit One

Parshas Korach, describes in detail, how *Korach*, Moses' cousin, started an ill-fated rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Our Sages note the juxtaposition of the *Korach* narrative and the section that deals with the commandment to put t*zitzis*-fringes on the four corners of our garments.

According to the Midrash, *Korach* used the Mitzvah of *tztizis* to make his case to Moses. According to the Biblical formulation of this precept to place fringes, one must also place a specially dyed blue thread—known as *t'cheiles*—, along with the other threads. *Korach* asked Moses whether a garment that was made entirely out of *t'cheiles* needed *tzitzis*. *Korach* was convinced that it did not. When Moses answered that it did, he was incredulous and started his rebellion against Moses.

What connection is there between the Mitzvah of *tzitzis* and *Korach*? And why did *Korach* insist that the *talis*-four cornered garment did not need *tzitzis*?

One obvious connection is that *tzitzis* is a Mitzvah that controls our eyes. In the Torah it says, "And you shall see them and you will remember all of G-d's commandments. And you will not follow your hearts and eyes..."

Indeed, Rashi explains that one of the reasons it is called *tzitzis* is because it is etymologically connected to the Biblical word "*meitziz"* that means "he sees."

Vision Problems

There are two general problems that people have with their vision, both physical and spiritual. The first and most common is near-sightedness, where one can only see from close and not from far. In a spiritual sense this refers to a person who does not see the far-reaching and long-term effects of his actions. Because this person is near-sighted they will do things that are short-sighted; they appear harmless now, but can cause great harm later.

The Talmud, therefore, says, "Who is a Chocham– a wise person? One who can see the future." Likewise in Ethics of the Fathers, Rabbi Shimon, in response to his teacher's

question "What is the best approach that a person should follow? replied: "One who sees the future."

There is, however, a second problem people have with their spiritual vision. It is called far-sightedness. Just as in the physical sense it means that a person can only see well from the distance but not from close range, similarly, in a spiritual vein it refers to a sophisticated person who is prescient and can see into the future. His handicap, however, is that he cannot see close by.

Far-Sighted Korach

Such a person was *Korach*. *Korac*h started off as a righteous and an extremely brilliant individual. In fact, he was endowed with incredible vision into the future. *Korach* saw how his descendants would be great people, included among them would be *Shmuel Hanavi*, Samuel the prophet, who was compared to Moses and Aaron combined. He failed to realize that Samuel would descend from his sons who did repent in the end, but that he, *Korach*, would be doomed. His fault then was that he saw the future clearly, but could not see the evil in what he was doing in the present and its immediate consequences.

On a deeper level, Chassidic thought tells us how Korach was able to see far into the future, into the days of

Moshiach, where he saw how the Levites—his tribe—would occupy a more exalted position than the *Kohanim*-priests. He therefore demanded that his position should not be subordinate to that of Aaron, the High Priest.

Korach was incapable of appreciating the present; he did not realize that the world was not yet at that stage where the Levi was on a higher level.

A *T'cheiles* Personality

In effect, *Korach* was lacking the "corrective lenses" of the Mitzvah of *tzitzis*. This is evident in his argument to Moses that a garment that is completely made of *t'cheiles* does not need *tzitzis*. *T'cheiles*, the blued dyed wool, related to the word that means to be consumed, we are taught in Kabbalah and Chassidic literature, represents the height of spiritual ambition, where one is totally consumed in his pursuit of spirituality. In his mind, he was a *t'cheiles* person whose vision of the future placed him head and shoulders above all those caught up in the "petty-ness" of the present. He reasoned that he did not therefore need the *tzitzis*, or the visual aid they provide.

Little did he realize that his own vision—while superior in one direction—was inferior and defective in the other

direction. While he could see from afar, he could not see the present and immediate future.

Spiritual Ophthalmologists

The lesson from *Korach* is to go to our spiritual Ophthalmologists, the Moses and Aaron of each generation, whose vision is clear because it springs not from personal ambition, but from the Divinely radiant words of the Torah.

The Torah vision does not negate *Korach*'s yearning for the future Messianic state of existence. On the contrary, that vision is a positive one, and as long as we are in exile we must combine *Korach*'s vision and yearning for the future with the realistic needs of the present. Both are dictates that come from one G-d. One cannot sacrifice one for the other, because they are complementary.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE UNBROKEN CHAIN

The Messianic Age is when the experience of Sinai will become a permanent aspect of our lives.

It will ensure a world of peace and heightened spiritual awareness by all.

However all the intervening links are crucial for creating the connection between Sinai and the Age of Redemption. Each and every link of our history is indispensable for the unfolding of the Age of Moshiach.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE UNBROKEN CHAIN

How could he be so Foolish?

Korach started a rebellion against his cousin Moses and his brother Aaron, as recounted in this week's parsha. The immediate question that arises here is how could Korach not have learned a lesson from the earlier misadventures of some in the desert?

First, there were those who worshipped the golden calf. Then there were those who demanded meat. Subsequent to that there were the ten evil spies—and those who accepted their slanderous reports against the Land of Israel. In all of these situations, the instigators were punished harshly and decisively. G-d's quick reaction should have left no doubt in the minds of even the most daring rebel that to start up with G-d's chosen representative, Moses, was playing with fire.

Even the righteous Miriam, Moses sister, was punished with *Tzara'as* (a skin diseases that requires the afflicted to be quarantined) because she said something only mildly

disparaging about her brother.

How then does Korach—whom our Sages assert was a brilliant man—do such a foolhardy thing; to start a major rebellion against Moses?

Directed Against Moses

One approach to answer this question is to find the distinction between this and all of the other sins. In earlier "escapades," Moses was not the object of their rebellion; G-d was. The golden calf was fashioned because Moses was absent and thought to have disappeared and was not likely to ever return.

The demand for meat was made to Moses because they thought Moses could get them anything. It was therefore not intended as an affront to Moses, but rather an affirmation of Moses' role as a benevolent leader who would take care of all their needs.

Even the ill-fated mission to the Promised Land was not directed against Moses, but rather against the Land of Israel and G-d's ability to conquer it for them. All of these examples of rebellion were thus directed against G-d and not against Moses.

The first time anyone stood up against Moses personally was Korach. Korach contested the fact that G-d had chosen

Moses. He therefore reasoned that he would not be punished because his was not a revolt against G-d, but one directed against an individual who, in Korach's mind, purported to speak in the name of G-d, but was not truly commissioned to do so.

Even Miriam's mild slander of Moses did not sway Korach to desist from his rebellion, because there it was a personal criticism of Moses for which Miriam was punished. In this situation, however, Korach was not belittling Moses, he merely claimed that he was not representing G-d, just himself.

The Worst Rebellion

In truth. Korach's rebellion was in one important way worse than all the other forms of rebellion. To go against G-d, although a heinous crime, is not likely to be emulated by others. To claim—with self-righteous indignation, as Korach did—that Moses was making it all up, can easily be employed by anyone who wants to flout the law but does not want to be viewed as revolting against G-d. All that person has to do is claim that G-d never said this or that. With this approach, the entire notion of authority falls to the wayside, because if Moses, or any subsequent teacher of Torah, made it up, no one will ever have any credibility.

Indeed, according to Maimonides, Moses' position is qualitatively different from all other prophets. All of the Jewish people witnessed how G-d had summoned Moses to receive the balance of the Torah directly from G-d. Moses' role as the ultimate spokesman for G-d was clearly established for all times at Sinai.

Korach's rebellion thus was in one significant way worse than any of the earlier rebellions. His insurrection threatened the very future of Judaism because Judaism's survival hinges on the maintenance of an unbroken chain of tradition from Sinai through Moses to subsequent generations. Anytime one repudiates one link in the chain of tradition, Judaism cannot survive.

The Bald Spot

The name Korach has been translated as "a bald spot," i.e., an open space or separation. Korach thus represents the attempt to create a separation between G-d and the Jewish people by removing Moses—and his successors, the Torah teachers and leaders of future generations—as those who faithfully communicate G-d's teachings to the people. Without these Divinely chosen "communicators" Judaism cannot continue.

In every period of history, there have been attempts at

creating this "Korach-bald spot" between that generation and the generation before. The farther away we get from Sinai, the more likely it is that some will attempt to distance themselves from the original communication of Sinai.

In Jewish mystical sources we are taught that Korach—contrary to conventional thought—was a visionary. He saw into the future and witnessed a glorious Messianic age. In light of our analysis of Korach, as the desire to create a separation between G-d, Moses and subsequent generations, we can characterize Korach's vision as one that linked Sinai with the future Messianic Age without the intervening generations of Jewish endeavor.

Links are Important

Korach was partially correct. The Messianic Age is the time when the experience of Sinai will become a permanent aspect of our lives and will ensure a world of peace and heightened spiritual awareness by all.

Korach was wrong, however, in thinking that the intervening links are not crucial for creating the connection between Sinai and the Age of Redemption. Each and every link of our history is indispensable for the unfolding of the Age of Moshiach.

Indeed, each and every person plays a crucial role in linking Sinai to the present and paving the way for the future. There is no place for Korach's desire to create breaks in that chain that leads us inexorably from Sinai to Moshiach.

ESSAY NINETEEN

RICH AND POOR MONTHS

One of the richest months of the year is arguably the month of Sivan and one of the poorest months is Tammuz. How do we cope with the adversity of Tammuz?

The answer is, by drawing inspiration from the month of Sivan and introducing it into the month of Tammuz.

Sivan will neutralize the negative character of Tammuz and even transform it to good.

This portends the Messianic Age when all of the fast days will be transformed into joyous days; fasting will turn into feasting.

But where do we get the ability to achieve that transformation? It is from the stored up positive and joyous experiences of Sivan.

ESSAY NINETEEN

RICH AND POOR MONTHS

Contrasting Months

This Shabbos is the first in the month of Tammuz, which follows the month of Sivan. In no other time of the year is the contrast between two consecutive months as sharp as the one between Sivan and Tammuz:

Sivan, the month in which the Jewish people received the Torah, is a most joyous month; Tammuz is punctuated by the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem that presaged the destruction of the Holy Temple. On the seventeenth of Tammuz this and other tragic events are memorialized by fasting and reciting special penitential prayers called *Selichos.*

If even the slightest movement within the world of nature is directed by G-d as the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, taught, certainly the juxtaposition of these two months is not an accident.

Sivan is the month in which we are given extraordinary spiritual and physical blessings because it is the month in which the Torah was given to us at Mount Sinai. In the annals of human history there has never been and there will never be, a single event that was as powerful and dramatic a manifestation of G-d's presence as was the revelation of Sinai.

Torah is the very source of blessing and as such is G-d's greatest gift to humankind. It is even more significant an even when we consider the fact that it was the culmination of the process of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage.

During the month of Sivan, we are at an all-time high.

Tammuz, by contrast is the month in which Moses shattered the tablets that embodied all that was given to us in Sivan. It is also the month in which the walls of Jerusalem were breached, as well as other tragedies that are enumerated in the Talmud. It seems that all of what we gained in Sivan was reversed in Tammuz.

If we were to characterize Sivan as the month of Divine gifts, Tammuz (as well as the following month of Av) can be considered the month in which we forfeited that gift. If Sivan is the month of incredible spiritual elevation, Tammuz is the month of great spiritual degradation and decline.

These two months thus represent two alternating phases in our lives. There are times when we feel G-d's hand touching us and uplifting us. We feel blessed and fortunate. And then there are times when we are down; feel nothing, and are overcome with a sense of spiritual and emotional impoverishment.

Sivan and Tammuz represent the alternating states of spiritual affluence and impoverishment respectively.

Coping with Spiritual Poverty

Now there are two ways we can relate to the state of poverty that we go through:

The first and more common approach is one of resignation. One will simply accept the fact that there are good times and there are bad times in life. These are times that we just have to plow through and wait for it to end, hoping and praying that it will be short.

The second approach is to draw from the wealth generated in and saved up from better times; attempting to search for and discover the positive in the negative.

To explain: Going through a joyous season can be compared to someone who earns a large sum of money and puts it in a bank or other financial institutions where the capital is secure while it generates interest and dividends

that can come in handy for a "rainy day" in the future. To not withdraw funds from the savings account in hard times would appear foolish. After all, wasn't this the very purpose of putting away the money in the first place?

The Biblical model for the above is the story of Joseph who advised Pharaoh to store food in the years of plenty to feed Egypt in the seven years of famine that were to follow. In this piece of advice Joseph was conveying not only a practical solution to the problem of famine but was also showing us how to cope with adversity in general.

In times of spiritual and emotional famine, we must draw inspiration from the times in which we experienced the richness of G-d's blessings. All of the spiritual energy that was experienced during our festive holidays or the holiness that we generate when we perform a Mitzvah never dissipates. We must use that stored up energy and inspiration in difficult times.

The Nexus between Rich and Poor

We can now understand that the two contrasting months of Sivan and Tammuz were intended for each other. One of the richest months of the year is arguably the month of Sivan and one of the poorest months is Tammuz. How do we cope with the adversity of Tammuz?

The answer is, by drawing inspiration from the month of Sivan and introducing it into the month of Tammuz. Thereby the month of Tammuz will be different. Sivan will neutralize the negative character of Tammuz and even transform it to good. Indeed, the prophet has told us that in the Messianic Age all of the fast days will be transformed into joyous days; fasting will turn into feasting. But where do we get the ability to achieve that transformation? It is from the stored up positive and joyous experiences of Sivan.

The idea that Sivan is the month of inspiration for the month of Tammuz is reflected in the actual numbering of these months.

Gimmel Daled: The Art of Giving and Receiving

Sivan is hailed as the "third month" of the year, while Tammuz is the fourth. In Hebrew, the numbers three and four are represented by the letters gimmel and daled, the third and fourth letters of the Hebrew alphabet respectively. The Talmud explains that the words gimmel and daled can be translated as "giving to the poor." Thus the third month of the year (gimmel) is the month of giving and the fourth month of Tammuz (daled) is the month of receiving; when we are compelled to draw from the inspiration of the third month.

There is, however, a catch to this process. In order for the act of tzedakah-charity to take place it requires the cooperation between the donor and the recipient. If the poor person refuses to accept the assistance from the rich, then there is no act of charity no matter how much effort the donor expends to give.

It is therefore crucial for us in the month of Tammuz to be receptive to the beneficence of the month of Sivan.

In truth, the month of Tammuz is not a bad month in spite of the tragedies that occurred in it, for which we have the fast day on the seventeenth day of the month. In essence, our Sages teach us, there are two forms of good: revealed good and hidden good. Since the true and essential nature of Tammuz is good, albeit concealed, we can understand how the negative features can be neutralized by introducing the energy of the month of Sivan into it. By introducing the dynamics of Sivan—i.e., by reflecting on the Divine gift of Torah and the love G-d has for us that it expresses—we help to reveal the true and hidden positive nature of Tammuz.

All of the above applies to all of life's vicissitudes. When we are at a low point in our life we should realize two points: First, all of the negativity that we might feel is only on the surface. And second, we should reflect on the good energies that we have generated in the past and are still accessible

to us. By doing so, it will enable us to expose the hidden good and make it a palpable and overt goodness.

All of the above applies to all of exile that began with the seventeenth of Tammuz 3,320 years ago when Moses shattered the tablets as he witnessed the way the Jewish people degenerated when they worshipped the golden calf. That event set into motion the destructive energies that made that day the day in which the walls that protected the holiness of Jerusalem were breached. This event unleashed a chain of negative events that led to the subsequent exile that will only end with the coming of Moshiach.

To help us cope with exile we were given the commandment to remember the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. These remembrances serve as positive and liberating forces that help us uncover the underlying positive energy within exile existence and serves as the catalyst to bring about the Redemption through Moshiach.

ESSAY TWENTY

TAKE IT HOME!

Instead of a negative reaction, the tribal leaders realized that their individual staff may not be so glamorous, but it was theirs.

It was their G-d given role that was intended for them specifically, and it was through this individual path that one fulfills one's purpose and life's mission.

ESSAY TWENTY

TAKE IT HOME!

Swallowed

Korach, the Torah relates in this week's parsha—that was named after him—started a rebellion against Moses for having—in Korach's mind—arrogated the position of leader for himself and the High Priesthood for his brother.

Korach gathered a group of people around him and demanded that Moses not consider himself above the people who were all holy.

The Torah then relates how Korach and his closest cohorts and family members were swallowed up by the earth and 250 of his associates were burnt by a heavenly fire.

A Staff Meeting

In the aftermath of the tragic rebellion of Korach against Moses, the Torah relates how G-d reinforced the position of Aaron as the exclusive High Priest. This was intended to quell any and every vestige of concern that Aaron has

usurped the role of High Priest from other deserving candidates. This was done by having each tribe contribute a staff to the Sanctuary. The next morning Aaron's staff blossomed and bore almonds. The other staffs remained the same as they were before. This was a clear demonstration that Aaron was G-d's chosen one.

The last verse of this episode reads:

> "And Moses removed all the staffs from before G-d to all the Children of Israel. They saw [what happened] and each [man] took his staff [back]."

The question has been asked, why does the Torah conclude that they took their staffs back? Who cares what they did with their staffs? Wasn't it enough that they saw the miracle that occurred with Aaron's staff and that their staffs remained the same as they were the day before?

Individual versus Collective Responsibility

One answer is that each tribe has its own individual quality and purpose. Aaron's quality and purpose was qualitatively different in that he represented all of the Jewish people and just one tribe. He was the High Priest and therefore his role was much more universal, exalted and crucial. Korach and his cohorts—and, perhaps, secretly other tribal leaders—were not content with their individual status.

They wanted a more glorious and glamorous role; they coveted the position of Aaron.

It May Not be So Beautiful but it's Mine

After they realized that Aaron was indeed unique and that they were not destined to assume Aaron's role, they could have become depressed. Their staff ended up not having blossomed and changed. There were no beautiful blossoms or nutritious fruits coming out of their staff.

Instead of this negative reaction, the tribal leaders realized that their individual staff may not be so glamorous, but it was theirs. It was their G-d given role that was intended for them specifically, and it was through this individual path that one fulfills one's purpose and life's mission.

The Torah thus states that each of then took their staffs. None of them declared: "Keep the staff; I don't care for it. If I cannot be the head honcho like Aaron, I don't want any part in leading this nation." They humbly accepted the fact that their responsibility was much more limited.

Appreciating our Individual Role in bringing Moshiach

As we approach the Messianic Age we must realize that while there is one leader – the Moshiach – whose staff

blossoms and produces fruit – every one of us has to appreciate that their individual role, while not overtly exciting and glamorous, is nevertheless what will make the ultimate difference and "push us over the top" into the Messianic Age.

Moshiach's leadership is unique even among other great Jewish leaders for as much as he sees the global and universal side of things; he does not lose sight of any individual. No Jew, or for that matter, no person, is unimportant. And no Kew will be left behind.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

LIFE IN THE FAST TRACK

There are two modalities for G-d's light to reach us.

The first is the "slow-track" as the light gets filtered through every "world through which it passes.

The second is the "fast-track."

The Priestly Blessing is an example of the "fast-track."

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

LIFE IN THE FAST TRACK

Haste makes Waste

Everyone has heard the story of the man who was asked by his wife to buy her a dozen eggs. While shopping, a friend passed by and offered him a ride to the next town where he stayed for a couple of weeks. Upon returning he remembered that he was supposed to buy his wife a dozen eggs. He makes the purchase and runs home, as he runs up the stairs to his apartment he trips, breaks the eggs and makes a big commotion. As his startled wife opens the door, he exclaims, "you see what happens when you make me rush!"

Despite the slogan "haste makes waste," Judaism places much emphasis on the virtue of *zerizus*, doing things conscientiously, with dispatch and alacrity. This trait has been mentioned in the Talmud as the characteristic of the *Kohanim*, the priestly clan, the descendants of Aaron. This association between the Kohain and *zerizus* without

"casualties" can be traced back to this week's Torah portion, Korach.

Speedy Almonds

When G-d wanted to show the Jewish people that he chose Aaron for his position as high priest, he did it by having Aaron's staff bud, blossom and produce almonds overnight. There are numerous methods that G-d could have employed to demonstrate that he had chosen Aaron. Why did he do it by having a stick produce almonds? Furthermore, why did the staff first bud, then blossom and then produce the fruit? Wouldn't it have been even more spectacular had the almonds been produced without the natural sequence of budding and blossoming?

This can be understood in light of the significance of an almond as the quickest fruit to mature. Indeed, in Hebrew the word for almond is *shaked* or *shkeidim* in plural, which means "to hasten." By having the staff produce almonds, as opposed to any other fruit, g-d demonstrated that Aaron's uniqueness was that he was on the "fast-track."

We can now appreciate why the staff first budded then blossomed and then produced the almonds. Had the staff produced almonds without the intervening stages, one would have thought that Aaron's fast-track status was at

the expense of the integrity of his work. Perhaps something was missing that was not discernable to the eye.

Traveling through the many Worlds

To understand the deeper meaning of the "fast-track" characteristic of Aaron, it would serve us well to preface some concepts of kabbalah concerning the process of creation. G-d first created many spiritual "worlds" that bridge the gap between his infinite light and the material nature of our corporeal world.

This is analogous to the process of a genius who wishes to impart his knowledge to a below average student. The teacher must go through several stages where he waters down his idea, translates it, provides parables for it, employs simpler terminology, and so on. After several steps and stages, the genius can bring his abstract ideas down to the level of the student.

G-d, similarly, reduces his infinite light and allows it to go through four general stages known as "worlds" before it can relate to, create and sustain our physical universe.

This method can be labeled the "slow-track." With each transition of G-d's energy from level to level, the energy is reduced as it acquires the characteristics of each of these levels. The light then becomes dimmer and dimmer. By the

time g-d's energy reaches us, we can hardly perceive its divine nature.

What occurs with respect to creation is repeated every time we recite a blessing. The blessing elicits more divine energy from its source and channels it through the various "worlds" until it reaches "our" realm. This process can take time and can be obstructed at any place along its downward "route." This can be compared to travel from one country to another where one might be detained at the border by customs.

The Priestly Blessing

G-d also occasionally channels his energy to us in an accelerated process, such as when a Kohain recites the priestly blessing. Then, the divine energy elicited by the blessing would powerfully and quickly flow downward, unobstructed, from its source to our world. The energy would thus not be "detained" in or diminished by any of the intervening levels.

One might think that the "priestly-fast-track" blessing is too powerful and cannot be absorbed by the recipients, since it did not make the same transition through all the intermediate stages. It's almost like growing up too fast, some might suggest.

To dispel this notion, the Torah tells us that the almonds that matured overnight — symbolizing the capacity of Aaron to introduce holiness at an accelerated pace — were perfectly "normal." They possessed all the features — buds and blossoms — of a normal almond. Integrity has not been sacrificed for the sake of haste.

An Analogy for Moshiach

What has been stated with regard to Aaron, can be used as an analogy to the way G-d will bring Moshiach. The prophet refers to the two scenarios of the messianic age. One scenario is that it will occur in its designated time; the other is that it will be hastened. While the second scenario is obviously preferred to the first, it can also overwhelm the world that has not adequately prepared for it.

Chassidic thought, however, discusses a third and more likely possibility that is a synthesis of the two scenarios. G-d can bring Moshiach before the designated deadline, but do so in a manner that does not overwhelm us. Just as Aaron's role was to bring divine energy into this world with haste, but without the attendant negative effects, similarly, the future redemption — we hope, pray for and anticipate its imminent arrival — can be hastened in a way that does not undermine our readiness for it and our ability to absorb its radiance..

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

UFOS

There is nothing wrong with the belief that **there may be other forms of life in other parts of the universe. There is even a Talmudic statement that suggests the existence of life on other planets.**

Only when the belief in aliens assumes a religious character, or when it becomes one's obsession, distracting one from more important concerns, that it is deemed harmful.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

UFOS

UFOs?

Our society has recently been inundated with stories about UFOs and aliens. Modern culture is obsession with these "other worldly" forces.

What is it that encourages intelligent people to believe in aliens coming to pick them up and take them away to other worlds?

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with the belief that there may be other forms of life in other parts of the universe. There is even a Talmudic statement that suggests the existence of life on other planets.

Only when the belief in aliens assumes a religious character, or when it becomes one's obsession, distracting one from more important concerns, that it is deemed harmful.

One answer as to why there is such an emphasis on aliens lies in the realization that some of the most bizarre human emotions are rooted in genuine spiritual faculties of the soul. Our soul is not only the source of life for the body and the source of its intellect and emotions, it is also the source of the capacity we have to believe and have faith.

Soul's Grasp of that which is Beyond Logic

When there is nothing to cloud our soul's pure faith, it expresses itself in just one way: faith in G-d and in His teachings. Whereas intellect can grasp things that are within the realm of the logical and rational, the soul's power of faith can "grasp" even that which is beyond the realm of logic: the Divine.

Indeed, everyone, because, of their G-dly soul, possesses this faith. It is, in fact, the most natural and inner realization of the soul. When, however, the light of the soul is obscured by the body's egotistical and materialistic interests, the soul's true sense of faith in G-d, is likewise clouded and often distorted.

In the past, when the soul's pure faith was obstructed it led to either denial of G-d's very existence, or denial of His teachings. The rebellion of Korach, the name and theme of this week's Torah portion, is a prime example of how one's

inflated ego, led an otherwise brilliant and very spiritual person to deny G-d's choosing of Moses as His messenger. Rebellion and rejection of G-d, is not, however, the only reaction that can occur when the soul is not capable of fully expressing itself. In the present day and age, we are witness to a very different reaction to the soul's inability to fully manifest itself within our lives. Instead of causing us to lose our faith, we might misdirect our faith by placing it in the wrong things.

Living in the Shadow (or light) of Moshiach

This, indeed, is what is happening in the present era. We are now living in different and unusual times. As we have stated on numerous occasions, we are living in the very shadow, (or: perhaps more accurately: in the very light) of the Messianic Age. This sensitizes us to be receptive to those things "out there" that are more spiritual and less rational.

On the other hand, we have yet to be taken out of Galus (exile). Galus is not simply a state of geographic distance from our Land. Galus represents the state of spiritual alienation; when we are not completely in touch with our own inner selves.

Diversion of Faith

The effects of the paradoxical state in which we find ourselves – on the one hand, we are basking in the G-dly light of the Messianic Age, and, on the other hand, we are still experiencing spiritual alienation – is that, while our soul is more likely than ever before to express itself and radiate with faith, this faith might be misdirected and distorted.

Rather than to put our faith and trust in G-d, His Torah and in the imminent coming of Moshiach (among the other 10 Principle of Faith, enunciated by Maimonides), there are those who divert their faith into other areas, such as belief in the occult, belief in aliens, astrology and in all the "isms" that have become so popular in the recent past, but have failed us so miserably.

The difference between faith in something that is not real and placing one faith in G-d, is that the former is irrational, lower than one's intellect, while the latter is super-rational, i.e., it transcends and goes beyond the intellect, it does not negate it. . True faith complements our understanding and feelings, deepens them and imbues them with more life.

The lesson for us is obvious. Let us learn to distinguish between the real and enduring values, the ones associated with G-d and Torah, in which to invest our faith and trust. To do this one does not have to dramatically change

anything, just redirect the faith and trust we have in the wrong things, into G-d, Torah and the imminent arrival of Moshiach.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF OUR MARRIAGE TO THE TORAH

Moshiach will gather all Jews from all parts of the world and bring them together both geographically and spiritually.

Moshiach's will also bring perfection and integrity to Torah.

When we are unified under the banner of Moshiach our Torah learning will be free of any of the Galus tainted subtleties.

In preparation for this time, the Rebbe issued a directive to study Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, whereby we learn the same thing daily throughout the world..

This, the Rebbe stated, unites all Jews through Torah and hastens the Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF OUR MARRIAGE TO THE TORAH

What Did They Accuse Moses of?

Korach's rebellion began with his gathering of 250 leaders and then proclaiming before them to Moses and Aaron:

> "You have gone too far. All the people in the community are holy, and G-d is within them. Why are you setting yourselves above G-d's congregation?"

Moses' immediate response is recorded thus:

> "When Moses heard this he fell on his face."

Moses was accustomed to rebellion. But this act of rebellion floored him.

Rashi explains that this was the fourth major act of rebellion and that's why it affected Moses so strongly.

However, the Aramaic Midrashic translation of the Torah, known as Targum Yonason, provides the following extraordinary commentary:

> When Moses heard how each of them accused their wives of committing adultery with Moses and wanted them to drink the bitter waters [that would miraculously determine if the woman was guilty] he fell to the ground."

How in the world could anyone in his right mind accuse Moses of engaging in adultery; a capital violation and one of the Ten Commandments? Even trouble makers and rabble rousers have to anchor their falsehoods with some modicum of rationality and believability for their complaints to be considered legitimate. Who in his right mind could entertain the idea that Moses was guilty of adultery, and with multitudes of women no less?

Moses the Judge and Counselor

The (19th century) work Nachlas Yehoshua proposes a simple, but seemingly inadequate, explanation:

Moses was the chief justice of the Sanhedrin. While his father-in-law Yisro counseled him to delegate responsibility for the routine and simple cases to other judges, Moses

reserved judgment of the more complex cases for himself. Only he was qualified to judge them.

Now, there were many women who had issues with their husbands and needed rabbinic counseling and guidance. Because these were extremely private and sensitive matters, many of the women felt uncomfortable in bringing these matters to the attention of lower level judges. They would only trust Moses, the acknowledged man of G-d. Moreover, as G-d's chosen messenger, they believed that he was uniquely able to give them, unbiased and unvarnished Divine guidance.

As a result of Moses' frequent meetings with their wives, the husbands' ire was aroused as well as their suspicion that something untoward happened during these meetings. If the husbands were truly embroiled in domestic disputes, their accusations against Moses served a dual purpose; they denigrated Moses, against whom the husbands harbored grudges based upon what they considered to be his elitist position, and it also embarrassed their wives.

While this might be a good explanation for the pretext of an accusation; it is simply incredible that otherwise sane people would impute this degree of impropriety to Moses. Moses, after all was the quintessential G-dly man. He was the liberator of all Jews; he dwelt on Mount Sinai for three

separate 40 day periods of no eating or drinking; he gave us the Torah and he was also the most humble and G-dly of all humans to have ever lived!

We are therefore compelled to conclude that while there might have been some utterly debased individuals who could believe that Moses would sink so low, the larger number of his accusers were, in all likelihood, referring to adultery in a figurative sense.

We also have to understand the connection between the accusation of adultery and Korach's statement that all Jews are equal and that Moses placed himself above everyone else? That accusation is about Moses' supposed arrogance, whereas what floored Moses was the accusation of adultery.

Spiritual Adultery

Where do we find the concept of adultery used metaphorically?

The Talmud invokes adultery when it discusses the law that one may not teach Torah to a non-Jew.

[It should be noted that there are exceptions to this rule. First and foremost a prospective convert may study Torah to know what he or she will be required to observe upon

conversion. Second, a non-Jew is actually required to study the laws pertaining to the Seven Noahide commandments that were given to all of humanity. Indeed, the Talmud states that a non-Jew who studies the parts of Torah that deal with his laws is superior to the High Priest entering into the Holy of Holies of the Holy Temple! Third, according to many opinions, the restriction applies only to the Oral Torah. However, non-Jews may learn the Written Torah, i.e., Biblical scripture.]

The Talmud bases this restriction on a Biblical verse: "The Torah was commanded to us by Moses, as an inheritance to the assembly of Jacob." Now, the word for inheritance in Hebrew is *morasha*. With a slight change of the vowels it can read, "*m'urasa*," which means betrothed or married. In other words, the Torah is not just a body of knowledge given to the Jewish people; it is their bride. And one may not take the bride of his fellow for himself. Hence teaching Torah to those for whom it was not intended is a subtle form of adultery.

All Equal or Else

If we were to apply this logic to the way Korach and his cohorts viewed Moses one might suggest the following to explain why they accused him of adultery:

Korach argued for the equality of the Jewish people when he declared, "For the entire nation are all holy." Rashi explains that his argument was that all of the Jewish people heard the Almighty give the Torah at Mount Sinai. Hence all of the Torah is betrothed to every Jew.

This raises an immediate question. How can the Torah be betrothed to more than one person? In Jewish law a woman who is married to one man may not marry another without being released from her first marriage through divorce or death. How then could more than one Jew study Torah if we were to take the marriage metaphor seriously?

The answer was provided by none other than Korach himself. All the Jews heard G-d speak to them and give them the Torah simultaneously. All Jews therefore are part of one people. We are one unit and therefore one spouse, and we are collectively married to the Torah.

"Aha," intimated Korach, if you, Moses, consider yourself above and beyond the masses, and if everyone is not equal then either we are all committing adultery for having taken the Torah to whom you were betrothed or you are committing adultery by way of your association with Torah. And since, we didn't place ourselves above you, then you Moses and Aaron have separated yourselves from the

community and have no right to claim Torah for yourselves; it is adultery!

Connected to the Unifying Brain

How do we refute their claim?

The truth is that Korach was correct in asserting that all Jews are equal for having heard G-d speak to them at Mount Sinai. Yet, he was wrong to challenge Moses' and Aaron's unique status.

The relationship of Moses, and by extension other great Jewish leaders throughout history, to the rest of the people is like the relationship of the brain to the body. No one will deny that the brain is "head and shoulders" (pun intended) above the rest of the body. Yet its superiority is not because it is detached from the body but precisely because it is the life-force of the entire body. It guides and controls every aspect of our lives. Its greatness lies in its connection to and unity with every cell of our bodies.

Similarly, Moses' greatness was that he was and is the ultimate unifier of all the Jewish people because of his unparalleled connection with them.

If anyone could be accused of "adultery" it would be those people who severed themselves from Moses and subsequent authentic Jewish leaders. To be part of one cohesive organism that is betrothed to the Torah, one must be connected to the brain souls.

Moshiach Unites and Strengthens our Marriage to Torah

Galus-exile refers, first and foremost, to the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world. However, the physical fragmentation of the Jewish people is also a manifestation of the lack of cohesion on the spiritual level.

Because of the lack of unity that characterizes our existence in Galus, our Torah learning is also compromised. If one can commit adultery in a subtle form by separating himself from the community or by not having a close connection to the Moses of the generation, then Galus is the ultimate form of degradation. Even our Torah learning can be tainted with "adultery."

One of Moshiach's roles is to bring perfection and integrity to Torah. In addition, Moshiach is the one who will gather all Jews from all parts of the world and bring them to the Land of Israel. This will bring all Jews together both geographically and spiritually. These two functions are

intertwined. When we are unified under the banner of Moshiach our Torah learning will be free of any of the Galus tainted subtleties.

In preparation for this time, the Rebbe issued a directive to study Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, whereby we learn the same thing daily throughout the world.

This, the Rebbe stated, unites all Jews through Torah.

It may be suggested that when we bring unity to the Jewish people through unity in Torah study, our unity then reciprocates and removes the subtle stigma of adultery from our Torah study.

The strongest form of Jewish unity is achieved through Torah unity. And by removing separation from the community we all become one spouse to the Torah.